# SELF-RESPECT MOVEMENT in tamil nadu 1920-1940



N. K. MANGALAMURUGESAN

# SELF - RESPECT MOVEMENT IN TAMIL NADU

DEDICATED TO THE GREAT SOCIAL

REFORMERS OF INDIA

DR. AMBEDKAR AND PERIYAR E. V. RAMASAMY

# SELF - RESPECT MOVEMENT IN TAMIL NADU

# 1920 - 1940

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**KOODAL PUBLISHERS**
121, West Masi Street
MADURAI — 625 001.

First Edition



**Rs. 40/-**

Printed at:
VAIGAI ACHAGAM — MADURAI
PARANI ACHAGAM — MADURAI

# Preface

The present work is the result of the part-time research conducted by me in the Presidency College, Madras, for four years during 1973 and 1977. This work formed the basis of award of the M.Litt Degree of the University of Madras. This is the first work and only one so far on the Movement started by E.V. Ramaswamy in Tamil Nadu.

I wish to express my sense of gratitude to the Vice-Chancellor and the Syndicate of the University of Madras for having granted permission to publish my research work. My deep gratitude is due to my Supervisor Dr.K.R.Hanumanthan for the able guidance and the deep insight with which he counselled me in the preparation of the thesis. I am also indebted to Dr.C.E. Ramachandran, Professor and Head of the Department of Ancient History for his invaluable suggestions given now and then for the improvement of the thesis and his constant encouragement in all my endeavour. I am thankful to the Editor of 'Viduthalai' for having permitted me to utilise the Periyar Rationalist Library. My thanks are also due to the Librarian and Staff of the University of Madras Library, Maraimalai Adigal Library and the Theosophical Society Library in Madras. My thanks are due to the Commissioner of Tamilnadu Archives and Historical Research for his kind permission to refer to some of the records at the Tamilnadu Archives in Madras. I am thankful to the Principal, Presidency College and the Director of Collegiate Education for having permitted me to undertake research amidst official work.

I am most grateful to Thiru. R.Balakrishnan, Editor, Tamilnadu Text Book Society for his valuable assistance in translating some of

the Tamil documents and Dr.Sarguru Doss (Late), who introduced me to a number of prominent men of the Self-Respect Movement at Trichi. Messrs. K.A.P.Viswanatham and Sathankulam A.Raghavan shared with me their experiences in the Movement and also gave me access to their private libraries containing valuable books and documents.

I acknowledge my sincere thanks to my colleagues in the History Department of the Presidency College and a number of friends like Dr.Kumaravelu of Pachaiyappa's College who had gone through the thesis and offered valuable suggestions.

I am thankful to the ICHR for the travel grant to go over to Delhi and consult records at National Archives and Nehru Memorial Museum Library, New Delhi.

Dr.K.K.Pillay the eminent historian of South India gladly consented to give foreword to this work for which I am thankful to him.

I am thankful to Thiru M. Paramasivam and S. R. Muthukumarasamy of Koodal Publishers for their efforts to bring it in print. I am also thankful to Thiru A.Balakrishnan for having gone through the proofs.

I can never forget the enthusiastic and silent help rendered by my wife in the preparation of this work at every stage.

N. K. MANGALAMURUGESAN

# Foreword

To write contemporary history is not as easy as may be imagined; particularly so when the themes dealt with are controversial in character. However, it is gratifying to find that the author of this book has maintained on the whole a balanced attitude; he has not lapsed into subjectivism. The work deals with the origin and development of the Self-Respect Movement. Virtually it concentrates on the career and policies of E.V. Ramaswami during the period 1920-40. True, several personalities like Gandhiji, Rajaji, Ramanathan, Tiru Vi Ka and Soundara Pandyan besides others move in the arena; but unquestionably it constitutes a biography of the Periyar in the making is during the period 1920-40.

From the outset E.V.R. was deeply moved by the social injustice which prevailed among the Tamils, particularly in respect of the lower classes. He joined the Indian National Congress, played a leading part in the Vaikom Satyagraha but soon discovered that in general the Congress was dominated by Communalism. E.V.R. had great admiration for Gandhiji particularly on the question of banishing untouchability; but when it came to the question of Varnashrama Dharma, they had to part company. Even with Gandhiji's interference the muddle over the "Shermadevi Gurukula" could not be settled. Little wonder that E.V.R. founded the Self-Respect Movement; it was not against a particular community only; his aim was the establishment of a better order of society.

Inevitably he had to encounter the opposition of several orthodox non-brahmin leaders, besides Roman Catholics and others. But his approach was non-religious and secular. His visit to Russia

strengthened his rationalist outlook. Further the Justice Party of which he was a member was renamed as Dravida Kazhagam and outcame the announcement of his ambition to found a seperate Dravida Nadu. Among the reforms suggested were the dropping of caste names, abolition of public holidays for religious observances, adoption of Temple Entry, Widow remarriage and even an atheistic attitude as early as 1940. The full fruits of his projected schemes followed in the succeeding decades, the account of which will be provided by the same author in the next volume.

I am sure he will prove a judicious authority on the history of the Self-Respect Movement in Tamil Nadu.

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# Contents

# Introduction

The present thesis is a modest attempt to explore the origin and growth of the social-reform movements in Tamilnadu with particular reference to Self-Respect Movement. Though a bird's eye-view of the social reform movements in India has been made at the outset as a sort of background history, primary emphasis has been laid on the Self-Respect Movement. Its history has been traced from 1920 to 1940. It was in 1926 the Movement was started by Periyar E. V. Ramasami, otherwise known as E. V. R. and in 1940 he joined the Justice Party and became its President. The major shift was made in the policy of the Movement. For the first time a political colour was given to his social ideals and therefore the thesis has not proceeded beyond 1940. Of course as a sort of epilogue the various stages of the Movement after its leader joined the Justice Party and its influence on other political parties of Tamilnadu have been traced. Its effects on Tamil society and culture have been briefiy dealt with.

There have been of course quite a few studies on the social history of India and Tamilnadu during the modern period. 'A century of Social Reform in India' by S. Natarajan traces the progress of social reform in India during the last one hundred years. His work covers the whole of India and therefore has not given much importance to social reform movements in South India. It does not even mention the name of the Self-Respect Movement. He himself admits that his attempt is only to trace the All India Social Reform Movements and therefore has to gloss over regional movements It is to fill up this lacuna in the social history of Tamilnadu, the present study has been undertaken.

Sami Chidambaranar's 'Tamilar Talaivar' throws some light on the social reform activities of E. V. R. but it has not dealt with at length the Self-Respect Movement. Here and there it has made only sporadic references to the Movement K. M. Balasubramaniam's short sketch of the life history of E. V. R. is useful to understand the genesis of the Movement. T. S. Tiruvengadam's 'The Dravidian Movement : A retrospect' gives an outline of the above Movement but has not indulged in any deep study of the same. P. D. Devanandam's 'The Dravida Kazhagam : A Revolt against Brahmanism' also gives only a sketchy account of the Self-Respect Movement. T. M. Parthasarathy's 'D. M K. Varalaru' pays more attention to the genesis and growth of the D. M. K. rather than the Self-Respect Movement. Of late there has been a spurt of foreign writings on the politics of South India. Robert L. Hardgrave's 'The Dravidian Movement' has merely outlined the history of the Self-Respect Movement. Eugene F. Irschick has done some commendable work on the history of modern Tamilnadu. His work entitled 'Politics and social conflict in South India'. The 'Non-Brahmin Movement and Tamil Separatism 1916-1929' gives us a graphic picture of the political and social conditions of Tamilnadu during the modern period. But his emphasis is more on the political rather than social aspects of the history of modern Tamilnadu. He is more concerned with the description

of the Justice Party and its leaders rather than the Self-Respect Movement.

Christopher John Baker in his 'The Politics of South India 1920–1937' throws an abundant light on the political and social conditions of Tamilnadu during this period. Though he has trodden merely the beaten track, he has succeeded to some extent in breaking new ground in the political history of South India. But he has not referred to the social reform activities such as Vaikom Satyagraha, Temple Entry Movement etc. Therefore it is not of much use for our study.

E. Sa. Viswanathan's unpublished thesis on 'The Political Career of E. V. Ramasami Naicker – A Study in the politics of Tamilnadu 1920–1949', is a candid exposition of the career and achievements of E. V. R. As the history of the Self-Respect Movement is inseparable from the life history of E. V. R., the above work is very useful to understand the genesis of the Movement. But it has not analysed the various phases of the Movement and its impact on Tamil society.

Of Course the major primary sources used for writing this thesis were Journals, Newspapers and Government Records. The Journals published by E. V. R. namely Kudi Arasu, Puratchi, Pakutharivu and Revolt contain valuable information about the activities of the Self-Respect Movement. They help us to understand the ideals of the Movement and the methods adopted to translate them into practice. But the matter obtained from the sources are rather one-sided and extreme care has to be taken to judge the plain truth from inaccuracy. For example the real cause for E. V. R.'s desertion of his colleague and Secretary of the Movement, S. Ramanathan in the continental Europe, is known only from the latters letter in other journals rather than the information given in the former's journal Kudi Arasu. Thus now and then the information found in has to be compared with corroborative evidences as gleaned from journals which were diametrically opposite to those of E. V. R.

The Hindu, Mail and Swadesamitran represented the views of the orthodox Brahmins of Tamilnadu who were all the while perturbed over the condemnation made by E. V. R. of the Hindu Sanatana ideals and practices.

Tiru. Vi. Kalyanasundaranar represented the opinions of orthodox non-Brahmins who sympathised with some of his ideals but were against wholesale condemnation of religious ideals of Hindus. His autobiography is a mine of information for understanding the politics of Tamilnadu during the modern period. Relationship between E. V. R. and Tiru. Vi. Ka. the reaction caused by the Self-Respect Movement are well portrayed in this work. However, they have to be handled with caution as there was no love last between him and E. V. R. in so far as social and religious fields were concerned. 'Kumaran', a journal edited by S. Murugappa and 'Tamilnadu' edited by Varadarajulu Naidu represented the opinions of those non-Brahmins who largely supported the views of E. V. R. Therefore they are valuable to understand the various phases of the Self-Respect Movement.

The views of the Government with regard to E. V. R.'s Communistic speeches and activities can be gleaned from the Government Records in the Tamilnadu Archives. The tussle between the Government and E. V. R can be understood from the letters and petitions he addressed to Government, the measures taken by the Government against E. V. R and his movement and their reaction on the Tamil society at large. These are well brought out by the Government Records. The Assembly proceedings also are useful to understand the views of the legislators about the Self-Respect Movement.

The author was lucky to meet some of the leaders of the movement such as K. A. P Viswanathan, Sathankulam A. Raghavan who were able to give first-hand information about some of the activities of the movement. Thus it has been found that the source materials for tracing the history of the Self-Respect Movement were copious and large though

they require very careful handling for sifting the genuine historical materials from them.

No one particular system of transliteration of Tamil terms has been adopted in this thesis. Popular and common form of spelling has been adopted for Tamil terms. As far as possible the spelling commonly used during the period under study has been utilized.

Without curiosity nobody can be a historian, according to Toynbee. The uniqueness of the Movement in its scrupulous exclusion of Brahmins from its fold, its broad secular attitude bordering on atheism towards social problems, its practical approach. the dynamism with which its leader and his followers tried to translate their ideas into practice, the striking originality of E. V. R. its founder, the popular nature, the tremendous impact it made on the political and social fabric of the modern Tamil society were some of the basic factors which inspired the curiosity of the author to undertake the study of the origin and growth of the Self-Respect Movement in detail.

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# Social Reform Movements in the Indian Sub-Continent

"Though it is more difficult to reconstruct the social history than the other branches of the history of a people, none can dispute its importance and its social value. An attempt to know the actual life of men in each successive ages of the past is well worth undertaking"[1]. But, paradoxically, for long, historical writing has been deemed synonymous with political history. Happily, in the recent past, a new turn has begun and more and more attention is paid to social history by European historians and researchers. Even in the Indian scene, a few attempts have been

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1 K. K. Pillay, *A Social History of the Tamils*, Vol. I. (Second Edition), (Madras, 1975), p. 4.

made to deal with social history in the proper perspective As for Tamilnadu, study of social history is only in its infan. stage. Hence, the necessity to undertake more and more researches and studies of social history, needs no extra-ordinary explanation since they alone can guide the social planners, who are vying with each other in diagnosing our social evils, in prescribing cures and in recommending ways and means for building up of a new-fangled society in this land of socialogical wonders.

Nowadays, people have begun to look upon every change as indicating progress in society. This is sheer fallacy, because genuine progress is earned by a change which aims towards a goal propounded and accepted by all reformers at the national level, and not by other changes effected for the sake of change. The complexity of the social change is well portrayed by G. M. Travelyan when he observes: "Social change moves like an underground river, obeying its own laws or those of the political happenings that move on the same life".[2]

Social reform varies from country to country The most important feature with which social reform movements in India have concerned themselves is the inequality based on birth which cannot be found anywhere in this world. The second is the religious belief and superstitious practices which exist in some form or other among the various clans of the human race. The grip of religion and religion based social stratifications had been so severe that the sum-total of the effects of early reformers like Mahavira and Buddha, medieval reformers like the lords of the Bhakti Movement and Siddhas of the Tamil country, have been next to nothing. But one must hasten to add that however, insignificant may be their effects the earlier reform movements provide a philosophical base for all sorts of modern movements of social reformation. Hence the study of them is of immense value to modern social reformers as well as to students of historical research.

2 G. M. Travelyan: *English Social History*, p. XVI.

What little has been achieved in the field of social reform in modern India so far is the result of the reverberations of the various reformations in the West. These reflective effects were either foisted on this country by the alien British rulers for their selfish ends or introduced after unceasing endeavours of national social reformers. The main concern of these native reformers was that social reform should aim at securing national solidarity and communal harmony. On the other hand, what necessitated the British rule to adopt a few pieces of social reform measures, was political expediency and not wholly social motivation.

Nineteenth century was a period of social ferment in India and any historian can safely mark this period as the beginning of Indian renaissance. Contacts with the West brought about ripples in the stagnant pool of Hindu thought. Scientific discoveries and rationalistic thought patterns which originated in the west had their echoes in the far off Indian shores too. These made an impact over the religious foundations of India. Added to this was the onslaught of proselytization vigorously pursued by the Christian missionaries. The educated Indians began to feel the pinch and they were losing their faith in traditional religious beliefs and age-old social practices.

In the Indian sub-continent, the social awakenings that led to the social reform movements also differed from region to region, though there were doubtlessly some common features. It is essential therefore that a regional approach is to be made in tracing the social reform movements of India in addition to the national outlook in its historical perspective.

Similar to the Hindu culture, the Hindu social institutions can justly claim an ancient pedigree in the history of the world. The Indian mind thinks more in terms of continuity and evolution than in terms of revolt and sudden change The past and the present in India form an unbroken chain. Before

proceeding further in this chronological line, it is worthwhile to notice a general social phenomenon, which differentiates the Indian society from the western. This is caste, the vertical division of society in contrast to the horizontal division of the western society. The intrinsic nature of the division too is of importance. In the west, the upper, the middle and the lower classes are mainly divided on economic grounds. In India, birth is the only criterion in deciding upon the caste of a person still. Even after so much of urbanisation and industrialisation economic condition plays no part in the social classification of Indians. Economic status is only an off-shoot, that too only in special cases, and not the sole foundation of caste.

The Aryan invasion of India can be taken as the first social confrontation in this sub-continent. The Vedic literature throws ample light over this issue and the inevitable struggle between the new-comers and the original inhabitants is portrayed in all its dimensions. According to many oriental scholars, the origin of the Sudra caste was not so much social or even religious as political. The fights between the Dasa tribes and the Aryans bear testimony to this. The next age, the age of Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, the Upanishads and the Puranas, saw the next phase of social growth. Religion and religious practices began to occupy a dominant place which ended in the ascendancy of the priestly class. Considerations of purity tended to make the then prevailing, social divisions more rigid and water-tight compartmentalisation began to raise its head. The most obnoxious of the social practices, namely, untouchability was the consequential and to the four Varnas one more, the fifth was appended. By the time of Manu, the social stratification of the Indian society in general was perfected and given a legal sanction and religious acknowledgement.[3]

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3. The date of Manusmriti is still an enigma to historians. It must have been written after 185 B. C. i. e. during the Sunga period. B. R. Ambedkar, *The Untouchables*, p. 146, Bubler, *Laws of Manu*, p. CXXV.

From time to time reformers made their appearance in the Indian social scene and though religion was their main field of activity, the brunt of their exertion began to tell upon the social structure too. Jainism and Buddhism were the two early religious movements that questioned the orthodoxy of the Hindu society. Buddha provided "a rational scheme for the ritual-stricken, caste-ridden man to discover himself". Jainism was a protest on the part of the Kshatriyas against the Brahminical supremacy and the exaggerated importance of rituals. But the Hindu religion's genius was such that these two protestent religions were in due course swallowed, digested and fully absorbed into the mainstream of Hindu religious culture. So, whatever changes were effected and aimed to be effected in Indian society were undone or suppressed or even castrated.

The next landmark in the Indian social reform movement is noticed in the medieval period. The Bhakti Movement of the South which later splashed throughout the entire nation, tried to pacify the strangulating hold of the communal and religious orthodoxy. But their arena of revolution was confined to only the precincts of holy places and not widespread enough to reach the lowest rungs of Hindu society. Their's were religious reformations and not social revolutions. The Nayanmars and Alwars of the Tamil country, Basava of Karnataka, Dyaneshwar and Tukaram, of Maharashtra are a few to name.

When all these doings and undoings were going on endlessly, the new religion of Islam forced its entry into the Indian society. This new interference instead of loosening the grip of the Hindu orthodoxy, added more to the tightening process. The egalitarian social practice of Islam never kindled the conscience of the Hindu religious heads and led them to enact a few counter-reformatory social measures. Instead, the invasion and conquest of the Muslims tended only to tighten the bonds of caste system among the Hindus. Under these circumstances, the European contact with India began.

It is difficult for us today even to imagine the problems early social reformers had to face. The social set-up prevailing then can be summed up as follows: Caste rigidity divided the society into water-tight compartments. Child marriage was the order of the day. The lot of the widows was miserable. Women's education was never thought of and when thought of was frowned upon. Even education in general was confined to a few among the upper strata of society. Inter-caste marriages and even marriages between sub-castes were unthinkable. Rites and rituals had taken the place of genuine devotion in the sphere of religion. In the sphere of social practices, superstition and blind beliefs and customs and conventions were ruling without any semblence of opposition. Whoever attempted to violate or oppose was liable to social excommunication. The early reformers of the Indian sub-continent sought to remove these and similar other social evils that remained entrenched in the name of tradition and religion.[4]

With this background, one has to analyse the origin and emergence of social reform movements in modern India.

The first force that shook the foundations of the Indian society was the western type of education introduced by the alien rule. The new-fangled education sowed the seeds of egalitarianism, rationalism and developed a scientific approach in the minds of literate sections of the Indian society. In this new light the educated Indians began examining the Hindu social structure, religious customs, traditions and practices. This gathered momentum in due course and the final outcome was the modern social reform movements of India.

One more offshoot of the western system of education was the rise of nationalism. As the appeal of the political nationalism grew by leaps and bounds, the essentiality of social reforms became minimised. Patriotism and national spirit were so sweeping that

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4 P. J. Jagirdar, *Mahadeo Govind Ranade*, p. 32–33.

people ignored the serious defects and imperfections that were scourging the Indian social structure. They were blindly devoted to the cause of political freedom and genuinely believed that the achievement of freedom meant an automatic solution to all the social problems. They went even to the extent of denouncing any attempt to solve the social problems as retarding the national struggle. These nationalists unfortunately never took into account the logical fact and historical derivation that the foreign domination itself was the result of the flaws and foibles of the Hindu society and unless these were removed and remedied the very achievement of political freedom would prove to be well nigh impossible and if at all achieved, the purposeful maintenance of the same might become short-lived.

Many social reformers of this era who were radicals in their approach to social problems were moderates and even conservatives in their approach to political problems. In addition to this conflict, another paradox also was there. Whereas the English educational system stimulated the mental condition fit for social reform, the English rule provided the social reform movement only a secondary place. This, as referred to earlier, was due to the colonial interests of the British Empire.

After painting thus the Indian social scene during the early days of the nineteenth century in a wider canvas, let us proceed on our study into the individual movements that tried to venture on social reforms.

The Brahmo Samaj represented the first organised effort made by the educated Indians to reform the Hindu way of life and the Hindu social system.[5] Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the founder of the Brahmo Samaj was the fore-runner of all the social reformers of modern India. Hence he is rightly called the father of Modern India.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy "advocated the study of the English language and of western knowledge and thought, he

5. *Ibid.*

attacked Hindu idolatry and abuses like the Suttee and criticized the caste system. .. His positive achievements were... the foundation of the Brahmo Samaj.... He was persuasive enough to make the first in road from within upon the massive structure of Hindu orthodoxy".[6] Ram Mohan took up the fight against Suttee or widow-burning and feminine infanticide. The former which was frowned upon by the Mughuls revived when their power declined and during the British rule it was widely prevalent in the northern provinces of India, especially in Bengal. Lord William Bentinck prohibited this barbarous practice of burning widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands, by Regulation XVII of 1829.

Brahmo Samaj was interested in making women come out of their houses and partake in the social life at large. Brahmo families evolved a new dress for their womenfolk half Indian and half European. They were frequently taken out of their houses and they began learning English through private tutors. The Brahmo Samaj, in the year 1866, codified a new pattern of marriage ceremony wherein many of the unnecessary and cumbersome Hindu features of the rituals were dropped. Even before this codification, a number of Brahmo marriages were solemnised a few of them inter-caste and some widow remarriages When the validity of these marriages were questioned, representations were made to the Government and as a result, the Brahmo Marriage Act was passed in the year 1872. This Act legalised the Brahmo type of marriages and permitted widow-remarriages and inter-caste marriages. It also forbade child marriage and insisted upon monogamy.

The Arya Samaj was founded in 1875 as against Brahmo Samaj. While the former was mainly reformist, the latter was essentially revivalist and was a cult on ancient lines. While Upanishads formed the basis for the former. Vedas were favoured by Swami Dayanand, the founder of the latter institution. He

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6 Vincent A. Smith, *The Oxford History of India*, p. 652.

denounced idolatry, caste and polygamy but maintained that all truths were manifested in the four Vedas. He was allergic towards Brahminism. Though in its sweep it was equal to the Brahma Samaj in its initial stages, its intensive activities came to be more and more confined to Punjab, the birth-place of its founder. The prominent members of the Arya Samaj were Lala Lajapat Rai, the founder of the Servants of the People Society and Raj Sahib Harbiles Sarada, the sponsor of the famous Sarada Act 1929, which raised the marriageable age.

The result of these two movements can be summed up briefly as follows: The religious taboos that were heavily hanging over the Indian women, began to give way and the religious tenets were made elastic enough to accommodate women with specific individuality They successfully broke the ice in the field of social reform The basis of Swami Dayanand was parallel to that of Ram Mohan, but the former backed the critical spirit and novelty of reconstruction which was the forte of the latter. The Arya Samaj aimed only at championing the cause of Hinduism from a new angle, and the Brahmo Samaj aspired for creating a new society in India, new and modern in all major aspects.

Another towering personality in the Indian social reform scene during this period was Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. Though allied with the Brahmo Samaj Movement, he was outstanding in his services in the sphere of education, particularly women's education. As an academician, he boldly removed the restrictions on the admission of students on the basis of caste. The next step was women's education. He firmly believed that unless the women were educated, the future of all the social reform movements was dim. So, he went ahead victoriously with his plan of opening girls schools despite bitter and acrimonious opposition from the orthodoxy. In fact, the ignorance and illiteracy of the women folk are the weakest links in the chain of Indian social reform even today.

The next move of Vidyasagar was widow remarriage campaign. In 1855, he presented a petition to the Government of India and soon a Bill was prepared and the same was made an Act in the next year. Thus the Indian widow who was either burnt alive or condemned to lead a life of torture both mentally and physically, found a saviour in Vidyasagar and they found a new sprout in their life of dead-wood.

Apart from the Arya Samaj, there were other echoes of the Brahmo Samaj in the western regions of India. Durgaram Manchharam of Surat with the co-operation of Dadoba Pandurang started Manava Dharma Sabha in 1844. Then Ram Balakrishna joined Dadoba to found Paramahamsa Sabha at Bombay in 1849. These institutions propagated the ideals of social equality and social justice. They ventured to eradicate caste disparity and even aimed at doing away with the caste system. Albeit these movements were short-lived, they prepared the ground fit for the formation of other similar movements like the Prarthana Samaj of wider sweep and deeper involvement.

The Prarthana Samaj was founded in the year 1867 as a consequence of the visits to Bombay undertaken by the Brahmo Samaj leaders like Keshub Chandra from Calcutta. Enthusiasts formed this Samaj for the propagation of social reform ideals like eradication of caste, iconoclasm, encouragement to widow remarriage, discouragement and disapproval of child marriage, powerful plea for women's education etc. Removal of untouchability was another item for which they strove ardently.

Ranade founded the Indian National Social Conference in 1887. Chandavarkar followed up with the formation of the Social Reform Association and the Social Service League. Under the auspices of the Prarthana Samaj Pandit Ramabai started the Arya Mahila Samaj. Women's education in this part of the country had found its enthusiasts in the early period only among the Parsees.

The Brahmo Samaj and its offshoot the Prarthana Samaj can be called in a way the Hindu Protestant Movements since they fought against the social evils that were corroding the Hindu society on a religious garb. But they never aimed at the revival of Hindu religion, their only aim was social reform. Yet, one striking distinction needs mention here. Whereas in eastern India, the Brahmo Samaj began to get evolved as a separate community, in western India, the Prarthana Samaj never distinguished itself as a group or community from the vast Hindu society.

The study of the western Indian social reform movements would be incomplete without a reference to Mahatma Jothiba Phooley. He was outstanding in more than one way because he ventured to tread on more slippery and dangerous grounds. He was the first to proclaim that the Brahminical scriptures were written simply to exploit the lower classes. He revolted against the priestly class and started a movement for the non-brahmins in general and the so called untouchables in particular. He stood for the dignity of man. He was the first to start a school for the untouchables and also a school for girls. He historically threw open the gates of knowledge to the lower classes and women because he felt eradication of illiteracy and superstition alone could break the shackles of social slavery[7].

Jothiba was in more than one respect the forerunner of E. V. Ramasami the founder of the Self-Respect Movement and the former's Satya Shodhak Samaj, the harbinger of the latter's Self-Respect Movement. The only difference was that Jothiba was atheist, whereas E. V. Ramasami was an a theist. Yet, we must hasten to add that Jothiba was not God-intoxicated. Albeit he prescribed a few rituals, he successfully did away with the priestly intermediaries.

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7 Dhananjay Keer, *Mahatma Jothirao Phooley*, (Bombay, 1964), p. VIII.

Now, we can sum up the major social reform movements of modern India: the first step towards the creation of a modern Indian society had been initiated. Caste barriers which had been scrupulously maintained began to show symptoms of a future adjustment (if not crumbling). Religion began to lose its grip in matters of social change. Education began to reach the lower rungs of society. The hurdles in the way of women's education had been removed. The conscience against child marriage had been kindled. The liberation of women in general and widows in particular, from the debased and cursed serfdom in the name of tradition and religion, was set on foot. Suttee the most barbarous among the Hindu customs had been banned. While most of the social reform movements were confined to the microscopic minority of the urban intelligentsia remarkable for their soberity and usage of the alien language, the Satya Shodhak Samaj was popular in its appeal and activities even among rural gentry.

Here it is worthwhile to make a passing reference to the first Indian National Social Conference started under the auspices of the Indian National Congress. This was founded in the year 1887.[8] Others which need reference are the Madras Hindu Social Reform Association founded in the year, 1890,[9] the Widows' Homes founded by Karve in Poona in 1896 and by Veeresalingam in Madras in 1898,[10] the Servants of India Society founded by Gokhale in 1905, and the Depressed Class Mission Society of India founded by Chandavarkar in 1905.

The second decade of the twentieth century, ended with the fall of the Czardom in Russia and the emergence of the

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8 B. Pattabi Sitaramayya: *The History of the Congress* (Madras, 1935), p. 127; Y. Chintamani, *Indian Social Reform*, p. 253; S. Natarajan, *Century of Social Reform in India*, p. 65.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 88.

10 G. L. Chandavarkar, *Dhondo Keshav Karve*, (New Delhi, 1970), p. 90.

first Communist state in the world. The spread and end of the First world war opened the flood-gates of one-world theory. The entry of Gandhi into the national political scene of India was a landmark not only in the political field but also in the social spheres.

Now we can set out to examine the social condition of Tamilnadu from the early days. During the Sangam Age, caste was non-existent. "The Aryan theory that mankind is divided into four Varnas or groups of caste, such as Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra was wholly foreign to the Tamilians of the Sangam age".[11] The Tamils of the Pre-Aryan age had their own pattern of religious and social institutions, language and literature. But the view of K. A. Nilakanta Sastri that the Tamils had a rather primitive and boorish culture is an understatement.

The Sangam literature and the earlier grammatical treatise 'Tholkappiyam' contain a number of evidences to show that Aryanisation in the Tamil soil had begun much earlier. The present Tamil equivalent for the term caste, is 'Saathi'. Though this word is found in Tholkappiyam, it did not mean the caste. Other words which loosely denoted the conception of caste were 'kulam' and 'kudi'. Tholkappiyam adopted a novel classification of society, which was both regional and occupational. The whole country was classified into five regions occupied by five different groups of people.

Early urban Tamil society as depicted by Tholkappiyar appears to be similar to the Varnasrama system found in the Sanskrit literature. But the similarity was more apparent than real. The general belief that all the Brahmins of Tamilnadu are immigrants from the north, is erroneous. This community

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11 K. K. Pillay, *Aryan influence in Tamilaham during the Sangam Epoch, proceedings of the First International Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies*, Vol. I. (Malaysia, 1966), pp. 271-279.

is the product of the intermingling of the Aryan immigrants and the priestly class that had a native origin in the Tamil soil. The religious practices of the Sangam period were simple and unsophisticated. But slowly [the complex Aryan rituals became popular among the kings and nobles.[12]

Women in the Tamil society enjoyed considerable freedom and we come across a number of women poets too. As caste system was not rigid, the practice of inter-marriage was not a social problem. Works like the Thirukkural of Thiruvalluvar spoke very highly of women in the social set up.

Owing to the influence of the Brahminic orthodoxy from the North which laid emphasis on ceremonial purity and vegetarianism, social classification in the Tamil society worsened into social stratification and even the practice of untouchability began to raise its ugly head. Dr. K. R. Hanumanthan opines that the immigration of Aryan Brahmins into South India and the consequent flow of Aryan ideas of pollution, the practices of segregation would have found their way into the South.[13] But this slant had been check-mated by people like Thiruvalluvar who condemns the practice of attaching special merit to human beings on the basis of birth. The Buddhists and the Jains tried to mitigate the severity of the caste system by stressing morality and education as the criteria for superiority. Even Hindu saints began to raise their voice against the caste system, the first rumblings being found in the utterance of Thirumular. His proclamation, there is "One Community and one God", had played and is still playing the vital role of a watch-word in the field of social reform in modern Tamilnadu.[14] He openly

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12 N. Subrahmanian, *Sangam Polity*, pp. 369–370.

13 K. R. Hanumanthan, *Untouchability in Tamilagam*, University of Madras, Ph. D. thesis, (Madras, 1974).

14 "ஒன்றே குலமும் ஒருவனே தேவனும்"
—Thirumanthiram–2104.

denounces the Brahmins in more than one place.[15] He even questions the caste marks of the Brahmins,[16] These ideas form the nuclei for the Bakthi Movement.

The Bakthi Movement in essence was the reaction of the orthodox Hindu section of the Tamilian society to the onslaught and erosion of alien religions, namely Buddhism and Jainism. To the caste-ridden Hindu society, the cosmopolitan Buddhism and Jainism were a welcome change. Added to this was the royal patronage of the new religions. Hence the Hindu genius was spurred on to act and the result was the Bakthi Movement. This Movement was not aimed at the abolition of caste system but was for the abolition of the distinctions and disparities based on castes. Religious leadership and status of godmen were awarded even to low-born people and the instances for these are found in abundance in both the Saivite and Vaishnavite religious literatures.

Saint Ramanuja, the founder of Visishtadvaida philosophy of Vaishnavism, a Brahmin by birth, went to the extent of accepting a Sudra, one Perianambi as his guru or preceptor. He was the predecessor and forerunner of the Temple Entry Movement. He ordained that the so called untouchables, panchamas should be allowed into the temple of Melkote for three days during the car festival. He converted a number of untouchables and Sudras as Vaishnavites and named them as 'Thirukkulatthar' meaning people of the holy caste similar to

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15 "சத்தியம் இன்றித் தனிஞானம் இன்றி
ஒத்த விடயம்விட்டு ஓரும் உணர்வுஇன்றிப்
பத்தியும் இன்றிப் பால்உண்மை இன்றினன்
பித்தேறும் மூடர் பிராமணர் தாமன்றே"

—Thirumanthiram-231

16 "நூலம் சிகையும் நுலலில் பிரமமோ?
நூலது காற்பாலும், நுண்சிகை கேசமாம்
நூலது வேதாந்த நுன்சிகை ஞானமா?
நூலடை அந்தனர் கான்நுவலலிலே"

—Thirumanthiram-230

Gandhi's conception of 'Harijans' in later days. He always kept by his side one Urangavilli, a Sudra by birth whose body he used to touch to make himself pure.

Among the Alwars (Vaishnavite religious leaders), Thirup-panazhavar was from the untouchable class and among the Nayanmars (Saivite religious leaders) Nandanar, the Pulaya untouchable was one of the leading Nayanmars.

All the four major religions were vying with one another to attract the masses to their fold and this competition ended in a healthy social reform. The established rigours of the caste system were thus relaxed. But society at large was not changed much beyond the religious realms.

One more feature of this Bakthi Movement was the recognition of the equality of the sexes in the matter of religious leadership. Andal, Karaikal Ammaiyar and Thilagavathiar are fitting examples to show the equality of status granted to women n the sphere of religion.

Next to the Nayanmars and the Alwars, the Siddhas, the mystics of Tamilnadu, were the most vehement critics of the caste system and Hindu rituals and their tirade was a virtual storm in the intellectual ocean of Tamilnadu. Of the eighteen Siddhas, Sivavakkiyar was the most critical. With his robust common sense coupled with a scientific bent of mind, raised the following:- "The offspring as the result of consumation between a cow and a he-buffalo does not belong to any of the parental species but to a new cross species. But the baby of an untouchable Pulaichi women sired by a Vedic Brahmin does not differ from the human species. Does this not expose the fallacy of the caste system".[17]

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17 *Pathinen Siddhar Padalgal*, Verse 131.

Kapilar, another Siddha has composed a book of verse[18] solely to condemn the caste system and to impose the responsibility of forcing the four-Varna caste system into the Tamilian society on the shoulders of the Brahmins. In the medieval Tamil society the Varna-based caste system had taken firm roots and the supremacy of the Brahmins was complete. In the internal tussle between the Dravidian non-Vedic cult and the Aryan Vedic cult of the Hindu religion, the latter has emerged victorious.

The efforts by the non-Brahmin religious leaders to overthrow the Brahmin supremacy in both the religious and social spheres, had failed miserably. Similarly, the efforts by them to knock out the caste system in general too failed to click.

As the Brahmins were very close to the royal dynasties in the capacity as royal priests and astrologers they easily acquired lands through donations by the kings in the form of Brahmadeyas. Thus the elevated position of the Brahmins was doubly safe-guarded during the medieval period. In the later periods, they were even appointed as Mahamandaleswarer and Dalavoys, or the principal officers in the civil and military administrations under the Nayak rulers.[19]

The intricate complexities of the caste system was so ingenuously contrived that all the castes except those in the bottom most rung, were able to enjoy superiority over others, however small the degree of superiority might be. So, this superiority offered a basis for positive approach to nearly ninety percent of the population. As years passed, entirely new castes and endless sub-castes were either evolved or manipulated. Communal disputes were rare and occasional cases of caste violations were

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18 M. V. Subramania Iyer, *Kapilar Ahaval,* p. 52.

19 A. Krishnaswamy, *The Tamil Country under Vijayanagar Rulers* 1964, pp. 162 180: R. Sathyanatha Iyer, *History of the, Nayaks of Madurai*, (Madras, 1924), p. 237.

dealt with by the local elders effectively. Inter-marriage, inter-d ning and other intercourses between various castes were never even dreamt of by social thinkers. The governments of the day were also for maintaining the social compartmentalisation. The only group that was totally unaffected, in the social sector were the untouchables. Even among these untouchables, there were groups which claimed priority and prestige over the rest.

It was under these circumstances that the political scene of the land began to experience totally new changes. The country came under the British rule. Even before the on-rush of the foreign colonial power, the Christian missionaries of various denominations had started their propagation and proselytisation. When foreign rule was well established the missionary works gained momentum. Hindus were converted in thousands and the conversion process was a galore among the lower sections of the Hindu society. Embracing Christianity meant not only a social uplifting but also an offer of opportunity for the economic betterment and educational improvement.

The imposition of a foreign rule, the introduction of western system of education and even the onset of proselytisation by western Christian missionaries were all even in almost all the religions of India. But it was in Bengal, some counter measures in the social spheres were noticed first and their echo was distinct and powerful only in the western regions of India. In the southern part of the Indian peninsula no social movement of modern origin exercised its sway either through natural evolution or through devolution. The branches of the twin reformatory movements, namely Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj, were the agents of renaissance and they too were ineffective in their operation. The orthodoxy in the South was so backward and old-fangled that the urge for self-reorganisation was also never felt. The South being a geophysically sheltered area, was always inert and inanimate towards such problems and it was quite natural to be so.

The one exception was the advent of the Suddha Sanmarga Movement of Saint Ramalingar in the nineteenth century. This Movement is spiritual in its content but it has its own overtones in the field of social reform also. It is not only a new religion but a new spiritual movement with due emphasis on social problems. It wants every one not to confine themselves within the limits of any one religion but to rise to such high spiritual realms, as to shed all differences of caste, creed, religion, nationality etc. and to experience the ultimate reality.[20]

Saint Ramalingar attacked the caste system more vehemently than any other religionists or spiritualists of the previous ages. He refused to accept the theory of the high and the low to be distinguished by the colour of the skin. He branded the caste distinctions as childish plays and condemned books that suggested and advocated divisions within religions and castes, as rubbish. He understood full well the fact that if social reform was to be permanent it should be based on religion also. He took up religious reform as his main stay and gave the world a new universal religion which never accepted distinction among human beings. He attacked the caste system chiefly on the ground that it was against the principle of integration of all souls through love. It is not an exaggeration to say that with the Sanmarga Movement, the social awakening of the modern Tamilnadu began.

The saint was grieved at the poverty prevalent in the society. Hence, he launched a project to eradicate hunger from the Tamil society. He founded the Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Satya Sangam in 1865. The word 'Samarasa' indicates the universality of its nature and the society was open to everyone irrespective of caste, creed, colour, language and nationality. He established the Satya Dharmasalai on the

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20 G. Vanmikanathan, *Pathway to God Trow by Ramalinga Swamikal*, (Bombay, 1976), p. 743.

23rd of May 1867, at Vadaloor, a small village in the South Arcot District. The third establishment was 'Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Satya Sabai' in the year 1872. The method of worship at the Gnana Sabai as laid down by the Saint is novel. No distinction based on caste is evinced in offering worship and even the person who is to officiate the worship inside the sanctum of the Sabai is selected not on the basis of caste but on the basis of his pure life — he has to forgo meat-eating and killing of animals. Accompaniment of musical instruments, offering of edibles, distribution of sacred be remnants which are invariably adopted in all other denominations are absent here.

The credo of the Sanmarga Movement is summarised below :

1 There is only one God.

2 He should be worshipped in the form of Effulgence of Light with true love (Devotion).

3 Petty Gods and deities should not be worshipped.

4 Meat should not be eaten.

5 Sacrifice of living creatures should not be performed in the name of these Gods.

6 No difference of caste, religion, sect, etc. should be observed.

7 Every life should be held in as much regard as one's own life on the basis of universal brotherhood, on the principle that all lives are equal in the eyes of God. The universal brotherhood extends to animals and even to plants.

8 Feeding the hungry is the key to the kingdom of Heaven.

9 The dead should not be cremated, but should buried.

10 All superstitious beliefs, customs and practices should be given up.[21]

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21 *Salem Mavatta Samarasa Sanmarga Sanga Ainthavathu Mahanadu Sirappu Malar*, 1969 (Salem District Samarasa Sanmarga Sangam's Fifth Conference Souvenir, 1969), p. 1–50.

Can Saint Ramalingar be likened to Saint Desava of Karnataka and Saint Vemanna of Andhra? Has not Basava the prophet of the Lingayat (Veera Saiva) sect rejected the authority of the Vedas, hated the false barriers between human beings, cherished an intense aversion towards Brahmins? Has not Vemanna sung,

If we look through all the earth,
Men, we see, have equal birth,
Made in one great brotherhood,
Equal in the sight of God.

Food on caste or place of birth
Cannot alter human work.
Why let caste be so supreme?
'Tis but folly's passing stream.

Empty is a caste-dispute;
All the castes have but one root.
Who on earth can ever decide
Whom to praise and whom deride?

Why should we the Pariah scorn,
When his flesh and blood were born
Like to ours? What caste is the
Who doth dwell in all we see?[22]

Of course, there were many in the religious firmament of India who had put forward lofty ideals of humanitarianism and brotherhood as equal as Saint Ramalingar. But the distinction of Saint Ramalingar was that he alone from within established institutions and started movements to carry out those ideals into practice. He was not only a bard of renaissance but also an executor of reformations. He happened to be a non-Brahmin by birth, which adds more weight. Ramalinga passed away in the year 1874.

22 Gover, *The Folk Songs of Southern India*, (London, 1872), p. 275.

Next to mention, are the branches of movements which were founded elsewhere in India, like the Arya Samaj, the Servants of India Society etc. Arya Samaj Movement started its branch in Tamilnadu some six decades ago. It had the association of and assistance from persons like Dr. Subarayan, Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi, S. Satyamurthy etc. Its activities included Suddhi on reconversion, widow remarriage, educational institutions, orphonages etc. The most obstrusive feature in the Arya Samaj activities was that it was manned by North Indian personnel alone. Hence, it was viewed by the common people of Tamilnadu as a movement of North Indians.[23] A glance at the list of donors and the names of office bearer is more than enough to prove this. Moreover the term 'Arya' also is there. Though Tamilians at large were benefited by the Arya Samaj, it failed to get the sincere co-operation of the Tamilian public and its overall effect was nothing more than 'nil.'

The Servants of India Society established its Madras branch in 1910 with V. S. Srinivasa Sastri as its senior member. It kindled in the educated young men an interest to know about the public problems of the society. The years between 1917 to 1921 was the period of intense activities since Sastri was then a member of the Imperial Legislative Council. The most striking of its activities, was its Service League of Madras started in 1912 under its auspices.[24] But, its activities were more of the nature of social service than social reform. Yet, reference may be made here to the formation of the Madras Vigilance Association in 1929 with a view to control immoral traffic in women. The Bishop of Madras, Waller was its president. This Association was

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23 Interview with Munuswami, Arya Samaj Pracharak on 25 January, 1977.

24 *A brief account of the work of The Servants of India Society from June 1905 to December 1916*, p. 17.

responsible for framing the Madras Brothels Act, the first of its kind in the country.[25]

The Ramakrishna Mission and the Theosophical Society are not social reform movements in the strict sense of the word. Hence, we need not analyse their activities here.

Then comes the Self-Respect Movement of E. V. Ramasami, unique in its ideologies and methodologies not only in the Tamil country but also in the whole of the Indian sub-continent. Since, we have to see in detail in the next chapter its origin, growth, victories as well as foibles suffice is to say here that it was a historical necessity for Tamilnadu.

Before concluding this chapter, we can portray a bird's-eye-view of the social scene in Tamilnadu which formed the spring board and back-drop for the evolution of the Self-Respect Movement.

Caste which was the most powerful social institution for thousands of years in the Indian soil began to be looked upon as something dispensable by a few who were educated in the western style. Whether caste system itself was to be done away with or it was enough that the disparity among various castes was abolished, was the topic of academic interest. This was so because almost all castes except a few were finding their sailing smooth in the social back-waters. There were many who were for maintaining the caste system but with modifications to suit the situation. These change of attitude was due to the consciousness of one and all who had come to know that the new ruler, the Britisher had no such thing as caste. Such a challenging situation was there even during the Muslim conquest. But the Muslim rule was similar to Hindu rule in so many ways and hence the change of

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25 S. R. Venkataraman, President of the Servants of India Society, Madras, personal interview at Madras on 25 January, 1977 by the author.

ruler never created any turning point in the social thought pattern. The British rule challenged social attitudes.

The major beneficiaries of the caste system were the Brahmins and the high caste Hindus. When these two had been striking a compromise amongst themselves, the caste system found nobody to challenge its existence and hence it prolonged. The British rule effected a social awakening which resulted in a crack in the caste system and all castes, especially those in the higher rungs began to aspire with a competitive spirit for the benefits of the changed political and social cross-currents.

In the sphere of religion too, the social changes began to cast their shadows heavily. The new education system based on science and social justice led the literates to disbelieve the superstition and other traditional religious avenues. The hold of religion over the masses began to lose its strength. The new rival, namely, Christianity, effected an alchemy in the tenets of the Hindu religion with a bias towards libertarianism, liberalism and egalitarianism. Even a trend towards sceptic doctrines and iconoclasm was prevalent. The self-regulation willingly imposed by Hinduism was religiously a bit sufficient but socially was not enough.

Women who were endearingly branded as 'better-halfs' but invariably treated as 'bitter-halfs', had begun to enjoy the fruits of education and social freedom. Sattee which was not a prevalent practice among the Tamilians, was abolished and its logic had an impression in the mind of women throughout the country. Child marriage was not favoured and widow remarriage was allowed. Women yet had miles to go to achieve equality with their men but their march had begun.

Politically, the new wave of nationalism was evident yet it had to churn out oceans before it evolved into a typhoon. The awakened nation had been experiencing the new pull in spheres other than politics too. Politics itself was intermingled with religious and social issues. Unless politico-social issues were

handled and solved with sagacity and flexibility, various cross-currents were liable to result in communal rivisionism and sub-nationalism. The entry of E. V. Ramasami into politics and his exit from the national current, his diversion towards sub-nationalism and racialism, his stint with communism and his steadfast measures for achieving his goals of communally oriented social reformations, are to be studied in the back-ground given above.

# 2

# Genesis of the Self-Respect Movement

In the years between 1916 and 1929 the nationalist politicians who were largely Brahmins, belonging to the highest caste in the South Indian social hierarchy, were challenged by a group of non-Brahmins who had recently begun to take an active part in the politics of Tamilnadu. They argued that the interests of the non-Brahmins of Tamilnadu especially those of the "back ward" classes were but poorly served both in the Social and Political fields. The conflict that developed between the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins in South India at this time was the articulation of a pre-existing social rivalry. The three constituent units of South Indian society – the Brahmins, the non-Brahmins and the untouchables lived their lives largely

isolated of one another [1] The mutual rivalry and antagonism between these groups in the social and cultural fields began to manifest themselves in the political field also during this period. The launching of South Indian Liberal Federation (Justice Party) in 1916 marked the first step of the non-Brahmins in challenging the Brahmin supremacy in the political and social fields. But the activities of that party were confined largely to the educated and rich non-Brahmins with the result that bulk of the non-Brahmin masses remained untouched by them. The credit of making the Non-Brahmin masses conscious of their rights, goes to E. V. Ramasami popularly known as E. V. R. It is he who instilled into them a sense of pride and Self-Respect by starting the so called Self-Respect Movement. He was indeed a charismatic and interesting personality. His founding of the Self-Respect Movement itself was a piece with his character. As such it may be worthwhile to study the formative influences which went to shape his ideals and which ultimately inspired him to start the Self-Respect Movement.

E. V. R. who is considered as a staunch supporter of non-Brahmins did not join the Justice Party at its inception. Though during the later period he appeared to be an embodiment of hatred towards Brahmins and Brahminism it is to be noted that in the early stages of his life no trace of such a hatred could be found in him. When he joined the Congress in 1920 he never ascribed to the belief of his time that the Brahmins were the protoganists of the system of caste. In fact his prejudice against Brahmanism was the result of slow evolution.

He had an aversion in his childhood for the sadhus and others who streamed into his residence. He believed that they cheated his parents [2] His adoption of such an attitude towards

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1 Engene F. Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahmin Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1969* (Bombay, 1969), Introduction (p. nil).

2 Sami Chidambaranar, *Tamilar Talaivar*, (Erode, 1939), p. 14.

religious mendicants and his reaction towards them have been revealed by himself.[3] His own personal experience as a sadhu in the holy centres of India also could have created an aversion in him for priests and priest craft.[4] When he went to Benaras he was disgusted with the Brahmins who ate meat and drank toddy. He was shocked to find prostitution as a thriving institution in such holy places. But even then he did not openly come out against the Brahmins. In fact he co-operated with the Brahmin leaders of the day. Communal hatred was not there in his blood. When he was in the Congress his criticism of the Justice Party leaders for their discrimination of Brahmins as against Non-Brahmins is a proof of his non-committal attitude towards Brahmins.[5] He first attempted to remove the inequalities in the Society and eradicate the social evils. When he was engaged in such a task he realised that the Brahmins were the custodians of those inequalities and social evils. It was the Brahmin opposition to his social reform Movement which converted him into a Brahmin hater.

## E. V. R. and Tamilnad Congress

E. V. R.'s first entry into the public life of Tamilnadu was probably made when the Madras Presidency Association (M. P. A.) was founded on 20 September, 1917.[6] It was an organisation of the nationalist leaders formed against the Justice Party. His association with Madras Presidency Association helped him in the development of his ideals. He found a place

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3 *The Modern Rationalist*, (Madras, 1975), Vol. IV. No. 7, p. 5.

4 Sami Chidambaranar, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 49–52; K. M. Balasubramaniam, *Periyar E. V. Ramasami* (Great sage E. V. Ramasami), (Madras, 1947), p. 17.

5 His speeches were reported in the various issues of Navasakthi during the years 1919–1920.

6 A brief discussion of the origin of the Madras Presidency Association and its two years of activities can be seen in *Appendix* I.

to satisfy his thirst for service to the non-Brahmin community. But the Madras Presidency Association an organization started for the uplift of the Non-Brahmins in the Congress, disintegrated due to several causes and caused difficulties for non-Brahmins to meet on a common platform. At this stage the Congress set before it, certain grand ideals such as amelioration of the condition of the masses, removal of untouchability, prohibition etc As these ideals were similar to his own principles on social reform, E. V. R. thought that by joining the Congress organization he could realize his ideal of bringing about a new social order.[7] The main goal of the Congress namely attainment of national freedom, was only of secondary importance to this new entrant. He himself states that he joined the Congress "with the belief that it would serve the cause of Society" and that it would plead for independence only after the abolition of untouchability and caste disparity.[8] It was this desire which made him to join the Congress when Gandhiji launched his Non-Co-operation Movement in 1920.

The question of the baleful custom of condemning a certain section of the society as unworthy of equality with the others and unfit for participation in the freedom Movement was perhaps the one thought that was upper most in his mind.[9] Besides this, there were also two great personalities who influenced him to join the Congress. One was C. Rajagopalachariar popularly known as Rajaji, and the other was Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu. Among these two the major share of influence came from the later only. E. V. R. remarked : "Dr. Naidu had made me who once was primarily a merchant

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7 An Admirer, Periyar E. V. Ramasami, *A Pen Portrait*, (Erode, 1962), p. 15, Sami Chidambaranar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 69.

8 *Vidudalai*, 14 October, 1951 (Passage translated from Tamil into English by the Author).

9 An Admirer, *Op. Cit.*, p 2, S. Muthuswami Pillai, Neethikkatchi Varalaru, (History of the Justice Party), p. 21.

and secondarily a public man into a full-time politician in 1920. Though Rajaji had a part in it more was shared by Dr. Naidu only".[10]

E. V. R. was also influenced by Rajaji who assured him that his ideals could be realized if he became a member of the Congress. Rajaji was particularly impressed by the rare selflessness and organizing capacity of this zealot, and found in him the right man for his party, the Congress.

Rajaji's invitation at this moment, to join the Congress was, well received by E. V. R. who was already looking upon the organization as affording almost unlimited opportunities for his urge for social service. And so he joined the Congress. He was welcomed because of the existence of certain ideological differences in the Congress with which we are not concerned here. It had gradually crystallized into a power struggle in order to imaintain a hold on the rank and file.[11] In 1920 the Brahmin tn the Tamilnadu Congress were divided into three groups under he leadership of Rajaji, Srinivasa Iyengar and S. Satyamurthi.[12] Factionalism due to ideological differences among Brahmin leaders existed within the Tamilnadu branch of the Congress in the 1920s. This feud can only be considered as personal strife with ideological overtones. Rajaji was in search of a person among non-Brahmins who would make a potential leader of the calibre of Varadarajulu Naidu and Thiru. Vi. Ka. His choice fell on E. V. R. whom Rajaji had the opportunity to know better, when they worked together as Directors of the Madras Presidency Association newspaper "Desabhaktan". As a result Rajaji had several times invited E. V. R. to join the Congress

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10 *Vidudalai*, 23 July, 1957.

11 Kalki, *Op. Cit.*, p. 38

12 E. Sa. Viswanathan, 'E. V. Ramasami Naicker and the Tamilnad Congress', *Journal of Indian History*, Vol. IV, Part I, (Trivandrum, 1976), pp. 191-192.

in order to strengthen its constructive programmes which included the amelioration of the underprivileged communities.[13]

Towards the beginning of 1919 E. V. R. made his final decision to join the Congress, although he formally became a member only in early 1920. E. V. R. himself said on several occasions "My ardent desire is to make the people rationalists, caste must go, and Brahmanism should not exist in the world. I joined the Congress only for these".[14] He utilized the period of one year for building up his image in the Congress circles and he became one of the chief exponents of Gandhian political concepts in the Tamil districts. He made public speeches in colloquial Tamil and succeeded in arousing the political consciousness of illiterate masses.[15] He aligned himself with the group led by Rajaji. Rajaji's support and the popularity he enjoyed among non-Brahmin members together with his increasing role in the subsequent Non-Co-operation Movement, in the Temperance Campaign, and in the campaign launched to replace foreign cloth by the progressive use of Khaddar helped E. V. R. rise quickly in the Tamilnad Congress hierarchy. In 1920 itself he was elected as the President of the Tamilnad Congress.[16] His wealth, influence and worthy experience no less than his power of tongue and sincerity placed him in the front rank of the Congress politics. He discharged his duties with characteristic zest and zeal. Tiru. Vi. Ka. applauded well his career and praised that if a prize was to be given to

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13 E. Sa. Viswanathan, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 191-192; *Vidudalai*, 26 December, 1972.

14 Periyar, '*Enatu Kolkai Ataravu Marrattirku Karanam* (Reasons for my policy change), *Tantai Periyar 90 vatu Antu Piranta Nal Malar* (Periyar's 90th Birthday Commemoration Souvenir), (Madras, 1968), p. 23.

15 K. M. Balasubramaniam, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 37 and 39.

16 Sami Chidambaranar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 70.

anyone for his sincere service in the Congress Party, first prize should be given only to E. V. R.[17]

## Vaikom Satyagraha

Beginning from April 1924 E. V. R. participated in various campaigns in which he began to challenge the views of the orthodox Brahmins on caste system and the stand taken by some Brahmin leaders on issues which he considered, helped the Brahmin community to enjoy certain special privileges both in the social and political life. None including the progressive Brahmins would have disagreed with his stand on these issues at this period but for the manner in which he launched his campaigns caring little for the susceptibilities of Brahmins in general. The first of such campaigns in which he participated was the agitation at Vaikom, in the princely state of Travancore in April 1924.[18]

This Satyagraha made E. V. R. to believe that the orthodox Brahmins would oppose any change in the existing customs. There was blunt disapproval by the Brahmins of any project that was designed to improve or better the lot of the non-Brahmins. A general dislike for the non-Brahmin community as a whole was much in evidence among the Brahmins. Every progressive move within the Congress particularly those which attempted to improve the social set up was therefore severely resented at; and was then and there disallowed or otherwise outvoted under some pretext or other. Periyar himself was described as "anti-Brahmin" and as one bringing about communal discord.[19]

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17 T. V. Kalyanasundaranar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 433.

18 For details please see *Appendix II.*

19 An Admirer *Op. Cit.*, P. 27; Ayyamuthu, *Vaikom Enathu Ninaivukal*, pp. 207-216.

## Gurukulam Controversy

The existence of such deep rooted hatred and discrimination happened to be revealed only by certain chance incidents in the routine business of the party. Perhaps the most glaring one in the series was what was known as "Gurukulam Affair" which exposed for the first time the ulterior motive behind any move of the moderates. So obvious was the Brahmin's hatred for the lower castes or their sense of communal discrimination that it is worthwhile to study in fair detail the so called Gurukulam affair which may be regarded as the test case for E. V. R.[20] His opinion against orthodox Brahmins was further strengthened by this affair.

The above incident revolved around the question of communal restriction that was imposed on the non-Brahmin students at a centre of traditional learning called the Gurukulam of Seranmadevi (Sermadevi) in Tirunelveli District. The Gurukulam fashioned on the lines of similar institutions of ancient India, was established by V. V. Subramania Iyer (V. V. S. Iyer) in December, 1922 at Kallidaikuricci, but later shifted to Seranmadevi with the object of imparting religious and national education to youth, inculcating in them the spirit of patriotism and social service.[21]

E. V. R. 's hatred towards the attitude of a certain individuals in the Congress did not develop suddenly after the Gurukulam incident or any other incident. The origin of his opposition can be traced back to 1921. In the 1921 Tiruvannamalai Congress Conference, he opposed those who criticised Sir Theograyar and Justice Party vehemently. Rengasamy Iyengar was one who had to face the attack of E. V. R. and others.

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20 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

21 Yogi Sri Suddhananta Bharati, *Viravilakku Va. Ve. Cu. Iyer*, (Tiruchirappalli, 1947), pp. 104–29; T. S. S. Rajan, *Va. Ve. Cu. Iyer*, (Madras, 1946), P. 52.

E. V. R. wrote in 1950 that even in 1921 some animosity had developed in him.[22]

The Gurukulam received for its upkeep donations from private individuals belonging to all communities and also private institutions. The Tamilnad Congress also had sanctioned a sum of Rs. 10, 000 from its own funds and had paid five thousand rupees as its initial contribution.[23] While the main objects were universally accepted, all was not well with the actual working of the institution and its management in general. There were frequent complaints of gross partiality. The Brahmin wards, it was stated, were given richer food and better comforts than those of the non-Brahmin community.

On January 1925, E. V. R. received certain complaints from the students of Gurukulam including one from the son of O P. Ramasami Reddiar (a later Chief Minister of Madras) about the enforcement of separate dining among Brahmin and non-Brahmin students. Even separate water pots were kept there for non-Brahmin boys.[24] There was a storm of protest against such discriminatory practice from the non-Brahmin members of the Congress as well as from those who had donated liberally for the establishment of the institution. E. V. R. could no longer remain an idle spectator of the scene. Being answerable to the various interest which had helped the establishment and running of the Gurukulam, it was time for him to intervene and to do something to set things right. A committee constituted to investigate the allegations also learnt that V. V. S. Iyer himself had given permission to two Brahmin boys to dine separately on the insistence of their parents.[25]

22 *Vidudalai*, 16 August, 1950.

23 Periyar E V. Ramasami, *Tintamaiyai Olittatu Yar*, p. 34.

24 *Vidudalai*, 30 March, 1950; Periyar E. V. Ramasami, *Tintamaiyai Olittatu Yar*, p. 34.

25 S. Ramanathan, 'Periyar Iyakkam', *Periyar's 89th Birthday Commemoration Souvenir*, (Madras, 1967), p. 65, Yogi Sri Suddhananta Bharati, *Op. cit.*, p. 190.

But V. V. S. Iyer was rigid. Abetted by his friends Dr. T. S. S. Rajan, K. Santhanam and others he maintained that any unrestricted promiscuity as clamoured for, "would prove highly sacrilegious and would particularly hurt the feelings of the highly religious Brahmin members.[26] The Gurukulam affair became the burning question of the day. Popular resentment arose and since V. V. S. Iyer was running institution on communal lines, it was demanded that either he should return all the donations received from the Tamilnad Congress and non-Brahmin members or he should agree to change the character of the institution. Iyer's supporters pointed out that interdining was not in practice either in society or in educational institutions run by the government. So they maintained that in the absence of such a custom in society it would be senseless to importune that the Gurukulam alone should implement interdining among its students. Although E. V. R and Varadarajulu Naidu had differences of opinion on various political questions, they held identical views on the Gurukulam issue. E. V. R. made a speech at Salem in April 1925 about this affair.

Gandhiji's interference in the Gurukulam issue also did not solve the problem. Gandhiji advised that the two Brahmin students should be allowed to dine separately, as it had been agreed to already but in future no such restrictions should be encouraged or imposed in the Gurukulam [27]

Apparently the meeting with Gandhiji failed to satisfy the parties concerned. E. V. R. and Varadarajulu Naidu gave vent to their feelings against the Gurukulam and what they considered to be Brahmin dominance in Tamil society, through the columns of their Tamil papers "Kudi Arasu" and "Tamil Nadu" respectively. T. V. Kalyanasundaram Mudaliar who was considered by his

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26 An Admirer, *Op Cit.*, p. 29.

27 Director, Publications Division, *The Collected works Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XXVI, (Delhi, 1969), p. 260.

contemporaries to be a more balanced person than either Naidu or E. V. R. appealed to Iyer to change the character of the institution[28] and suggested to transfer the institution from Seranmadevi to another centre.[29] But Iyer not merely turned a deaf ear to this but also criticized him for lending support to malicious campaign in Tamilnadu.[30]

The situation grew increasingly tense and called for some more drastic action. Some efforts were made at the Tamilnad Congress annual meeting to settle the issue of interdining. Some of them held that the Congress had no jurisdiction over matters concerning a private institution. Nonetheless Varadarajulu Naidu who did not fully succeed in raising the Gurukulam issue at the Congress meeting held on 29 April 1925 succeeded in limiting the agenda specifically to the question of interdining. At the conclusion of his presidential address he moved a resolution which expressed the regret of the Tamilnad Congress at having paid five thousand rupees to the Gurukulam.[31] But his resolution failed to get the approval of the Committee. Rajaji moved a resolution which said that the internal management of the Gurukulam should be left to the people who run it but that the pupils of the institution should dine together without discrimination.[32] This resolution of Rajaji was also not approved by the committee. Finally S. Ramanathan's resolution which recommened that the gradations

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28 T. P. Meenakshisundaran, *Tiru. T .V. K : The Living*, Tamil Culture, Vol. VII, (Madras, 1958), pp. 17-18.

29 T. V. Kalyanasundaranar, *Op. Cit.*, P. 775; T. S. S. Rajan, *Op. Cit.*, p. 53.

30 *Hindu*, 21 April, 1925

31 *Hindu*, 30 April, 1925; *Navasakthi*, 8 and 22 May, 1925.

32 *Ibid.*, 30 April, 1925, *Kudi Arasu*, 12 July, 1925: *Kumaran*, 18 November, 1925.

of merit based on birth should not be observed by any organisation participating in the national movement was approved and V. Thiagaraja Chettiar of Devakottai, Ramanathan and E. V. Ramasami were appointed to help the Gurukulam to implement this principle.[33] Out of twenty-six members nineteen voted for it and seven against it. Rajaji, Rajan, Vijayaraghavachariar, K. Santhanam, Dr. Swaminatha Sastri and N. S. Varadachari (all Brahmins only) opposed the resolution.[34] This confirmed the belief of E. V. R. that the Brahmins whether traditionalists or progressives, were essentially communal in outlook. At this time a censure motion which was moved against Varadarajulu Naidu condemning him for endangering national unity by promoting communal ill-feeling in Tamil society was rejected but it helped to widen the split within the Tamilnad congress.[35]

In his capacity as the Secretary of the Tamilnad Congress E. V R. refused to pay the balance amount of Rupees Five Thousand due to Gurukulam until and unless the common mess system advocated by Gandhiji was practised. V. V. S. Iyer and his band of associates, therefore decided to get the money without E. V. R.'s knowledge ; and they succeeded in doing so. They got the cheque from the joint secretary K. Santhanam, a Brahmin[36] This also made E. V. R to declare an "all-out

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33 *Ibid*, 30 April, 1925; *Kudi Arasu*, 10 May, 1925.

34 S. Ramanathan, 'Periyar Iyakkam', *Periyar's 89th Birth day Commemoration Souvenir*, p. 66.

35 This motion was rejected by a majority of five votes. The censure motion of Rajaji was supported by Saminatha Sastri, T. S. S. Rajan, K. Santhanam, Halasyam Iyer, N. S. Varadachari, Apparao and V. Krishnamachari (all Brahmins). The censure motion was outvoted by E. V. R., Tiru. Vi Ka , S. Ramanathan, Rathinasami Gounder, Ramachandran Chettiar, Singaravelu Chettiar, Thangapperumal, Adhinarayanan Chettiar and O. P. Ramasamy Reddiar, *Vidudalai* 6 January, 1960.

36 An Admirer, *Op. Cit.*, p. 30.

war'' on the Gurukulam. M. Baktavatsalam criticised Varadarajulu Naidu only.[37] But this incident developed a deep animosity in the heart of E. V. R. and hastened his decision to quit the Congress.

## Communal Representation

From then on were heard the rumblings of the permanent rupture and everyday witnessed the ever widening gulf between E. V. R and the Brahmin leaders.[38] The final parting of the ways occurred at Conjeevaram in 1925. While in the first instance, it appeared to be just ideological difference, it had gradually, taken the vile shape of communalism, and it seemed as though the bane had come to stay. It was felt that it was showing itself in almost every field of activity, and was practically behind every move and every decision of the Brahmin members inside the party and out. E. V. R. and his associates thought that in the public services as in the society, the menace had almost reached the peak, so that the

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37 Mahatma Gandhi wanted this year to be a 'spining year' but Dr. Naidu is making it a 'non-Brahmin year', *Hindu*, 19 April, 1925; *Hindu*, 30 April, 1925; *Puratchi*, 3 December, 1933.

38 E. V. R.'s statement in 1960 indicates the dominance of Brahmins in details. In the 1920's the position was as this : The State Congress Committee President was T. V. Venkatarama Iyer.

The following were the District Congress Committee Presidents :

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Madurai | Vaidyanatha Iyer. |
| 2. | Tiruchi | Saminatha Iyer. |
| 3. | Tanjore | Banthulu Iyer. |
| 4 | Tirunelveli | Mahadeva Iyer. |
| 5. | Coimbatore | N. S. Ramasami Iyer. |
| 6. | Salem | Rama Rao. |
| 7. | North Arcot | Subrahmanya Sastri. |
| 8. | Madras | Rengasami Iyengar. |

-*Vidudalai*, 6 January, 1961.

need to protect the interest of the non-Brahmins from the Brahmin exploitation was felt as never before. Therefore E. V R. decided to hit on some measure that would provide adequate protection to the non-Brahmins. And so was evolved a plan for communal justice. The plan which insisted on the reservation of seats for the non-Brahmin communities in the legislature and in the services, was something of a master-plan that meant so much for them one which had in the promise of a "fair-deal".[39] But the question of communal representation for non-Brahmins had its strong opponents as well as its adherents.[40]

Another incident was also a cause which led him to take a decision to quit congress. When E. V. R. succeeded in passing a resolution against caste, Brahmin leaders resigned. When this was brought to the notice of Gandhi, he replied that they were not against abolition of caste but as it was against their conscious thus opposed it This stand of Gandhi also had created a slight stir in him.[41]

Before the communal animosity, aroused over the Gurukulam controversy could wane out, the Tamilnad Congress met at Conjeevaram to discuss about council entry. It was a question hotly discussed by all political parties of the day. E. V. R.'s main object in participating in this conference was to get a mandate from the Tamilnad Congress on the question of communal representation This question seems to be the basic issue that lingered in his mind with regard to all the problems of the day. But the base for this issue lay even before his association with the Congress. Even when he was actively engaged in the Madras Presidency Association, he stressed the need for communal representation and insisted that a conference should be held at Erode wherein a resolution on communal representation

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39 An Admirer, *Op. Cit.*, p. 53.

40 S. Irschick, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 27-54.

41 *Vidudalai*, 30 March, 1950.

should be passed.[42] During the years 1919 to 1925 he fought vigorously for communal representation. His request for passing resolutions on communal representation was disallowed in the Congress sessions of 1919 (Tiruchi); 1920 (Tirunelveli); 1921 (Tanjore); 1922 (Tiruppur); 1923 (Madurai) and 1924 (Tiruvannamalai).[43]

Though this issue forms part of a political issue, it has to be discussed at length for its importance. It is worthwhile to know the event that happened in the Provincial Congress held at Tirunelveli in the year 1920. S. Srinivasa Iyengar was in the chair. In collaboration with V. O. Chidambaram Pillai, E. V. R. prepared a resolution demanding communal representation in the government service. When this resolution was proposed at the session the Brahmin leadership began threatening the party. They made Diwan Rama Rao to declare categorically that if that particular resolution was passed then all Brahmins would resign from the Congress Party en masse. But the non-Brahmins did not yield to that threat. Then the Brahmins assembled and after long deliberations they decided to table an amendment. The amendment as proposed by Rajaji replaced the words "percentage" by "Adequate representation." They convinced E. V. R that both the words had got the same meaning. It was complained by him that they had manipulated the resolution in such a way that the hands of Muslim members also were raised when the amendment was put to vote.[44]

In the above Conference the resolution which had been adopted by the Subjects Committee with a majority of six votes,

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42 *Kudi Arasu*, 6 December, 1925.

43 Anaimuthu, (Ed.). *Periyar Sinthanaikal*, (Thoughts of Periyar E. V. R.), (Tiruchy, 1975).

44 *Modern Rationalist*, (Madras, 1974), August, pp. 1-10.

was eventually turned down in the final stages by the Chairman of the Conference S. Srinivasa Iyengar who characterised the resolution as one 'detrimental to national unity'.[45] Right from 1920, year after year E. V R. tried to push through the motion, and year after year with clock work regularity, the same fate befell it. Everytime, it was rejected or withheld under some pretext or other.

In 1921, in the Tanjore Congress session Rajaji had given tacit approval for the resolution but had pleaded with E. V. R. not to make an issue of it in the larger interest of national unity. In 1922 in the Tiruppur session of the Congress the debates were marred by personal attacks by extremists from both Brahmin and non-Brahmin groups. In this conference E V. R. got annoyed and announced that the code of Manu and Ramayana should be destroyed. The chaotic situation was controlled by Vijayaraghavachariar. In the following year 1923 at Salem there was the possibility for eruption again. But George Joseph and Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu controlled it. Although E V. R. had been President of the conference at Tiruvannamalai in 1924, he was not even then able to get a majority for his resolution because of Srinivasa Iyengar, who is said to have undermined his efforts.[46]

In the Conjeevaram Conference of the Tamilnad Congress in 1925, he therefore, decided to get his most-disputed resolution passed at any cost. His endeavour in this proved to be his last attempt to remain in the Congress. E. V. R. believed that since the All India Congress Committee at the Patna session in September 1925 had given a mandate to the Swaraj Party to carry on the work inside the Central Legislature and Provincial Councils on behalf of the Congress, the Tamilnad Congress Committee would

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45 Sami Chidambaranar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 92; *Kudi Arasu*, 6 December, 1925.

46 Sami Chidambaranar, *Op, Cit.*, p. 53.

take a decision on the Patna resolution.[47] S. Srinivasa Iyengar the Swarajist Party leader, put his proposals in the form of a resolution.[48]

When the resolution of Council entry was taken up for discussion S. Ramanathan insisted that the allied question of communal representation should also be discussed at the same time. Thereupon the Committee considered the resolution put up by E. V. R. demanding proportional representation on the basis of population strength for the non-Brahmin communities.[49] The resolution failed to gain support from the members of the Subjects Committee, who rejected part 'A' of the resolution but adopted part 'B' in a modified form.[50] As E. V. R. was not satisfied with

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47 B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. I (1885–1935), (Delhi, 1969). pp. 288–99.

48 Part A: This conference recommends to the Kanpur Congress to adopt the resolution passed by the All India Congress Committee at Patna with the modification that Khaddar should always be worn by Congressmen

Part B: "This conference also recommends to the Kanpur Congress that the Congress should conduct political work more vigorously than the Swarajya Party had hitherto done and should also carry on the campaign of capturing the Councils and the existence of the Swarajya Party as a separate party is unnecessary in future" — *Hindu* 23 November, 1925; *Kudi Arasu*, 29 November, 1925.

49 *Ibid.*, 23 November, 1925.

50 Part A: The resolution of E. V. R. moved by S. Ramanathan, "This conference resolves that as it is necessary for the advancement of the country there should be more of mutual trust and less of bitterness between several communities among Hindus. there should be representation in Legislative Council and other bodies according to the population strength of Brahmins, non-Brahmins and Depressed classes.

the conciliatory move, he informed the committee that he would again bring up both parts of the resolution at the main session of the conference itself. Tiru. Vi. Ka. who was the President of the Conference suggested that E. V. R. might do so provided part 'A' of his resolution won the support of 25 delegates. In the meantime Srinivasa Iyengar had withdrawn his resolution as he considered that it was this resolution which motivated E. V. R. to urge his policy of communal representation. It was expected that in the light of this new development he would not make an issue of it. Nevertheless he decided to stick to his decision.[51]

The lack of consensus among the various non-Brahmin groups led to the defeat of E. V. R.'s resolution. At the instance of E. V. R. a meeting of the non-Brahmin delegates attending the conference was held at the Kamakshi Theatre in Conjeevaram under the Presidentship of T. A. Ramalingam Chettiar, a former Justicite. After a prolonged discussion at this sitting of the meeting a general resolution requesting the Tamilnad Congress to put up for the next general election, candidates 90% of whom should be non-Brahmins of this 33 1/3% should be from the Depressed classes.[52]

The practical minded politicians both in the Brahmin and the non-Brahmin groups of the Tamilnad Congress were aware of the prevailing mood among the followers of E. V. R.

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Part B : That tbis conference having regard to the need for unity and welfare of different communities, urges the desirability of constituting a selection committee for nominating candidates for the elections in this Presidency next year after the Kanpur Congress had decided to run the elections themselves. *Hindu* 23 November, 1925.

51 *Hindu*, 23 November, 1925; *Kudi Arasu*, 24 November, 1925; 1, 8, 15 December, 1925.

52 *Hindu and Mail*, 23 November, 1925.

but they failed to move the Congress machinery to take positive step to suggest a solution for this communal problem. E. V. R. felt that the Brahmin leaders on account of their vested interests were opposed to any measure that sought to improve the political fortunes of the non-Brahmin community. E. V R. contended that the withdrawal of resolution by Srinivasa Iyengar was itself a clever manipulation of Rajaji and a step to make the communal representation resolution technically null and void. E. V R felt that non-Brahmins like Tiru. Vi. Ka. were used as pawns by the Brahmins.[53]

When E. V. R. questioned Tiru. Vi Ka. why he demanded 25 signatures if he had a mind to disallow it. Tiru. Vi. Ka. replied that the circumstance under which he demanded 25 signatures was different from the circumstance under which the resolution was dismissed.[54] He made it clear that he was neither swayed by any extraneous considerations nor influenced by any group in rejecting E. V. R.'s resolution.[55] He felt that this communal representation was the much needed arrangement for the development of the country and for the unity and equality among the people. So he walked out of the Congress fold after joining issue with them over this demand. From then on whatever the political philosophy might be he accepted everything which was in favour of communal representation and rejected that which was against the same. He was of firm belief that the Brahmins were in the national organisation

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53 *Op. Cit.*, *Vidudalai*, 1 June, 1954.

54 The attitude of Tiru. Vi. Ka. towards E. V. R.'s resolution was condemned by some of the newspapers in Tamilnadu. Even Brahmins criticised him, in support of E. V. R. Rengaswamy Iyengar worte in a Magazine called Sukothayam, defending E. V. R. *Sukothayam*, 26 November, 1925; *Tamilnadu*, 29 November, 1925; *Nava India*, 29 November, 1925; *Swarajva*, 24 November, 1925; *Sailul Islam*, 25 November, 1925; *Lokopakari*, 26 November, 1925; *Ooliyan*, 1 December, 1925.

55 *Navasakti*, 27 November, 1925 and 18 December, 1925.

only to further their own political interests rather than to strive for the independence. Whenever he stressed the need for communal representation he pointed that this was accepted by the Government even in 1840 and quoted the 125th Board Standing Order of 1840.[56] E. V. R. felt that since the governmental power was in the hands of the Brahmins it did not come into practice.[57] The great institution, which once attracted E. V. R. as affording the best opportunities for fighting the social evils, was now the very one which sheltered and nurtured them.

Another incident which hastened his total break with the Congress was his misunderstanding with K. Santhanam. When Santhanam in the capacity as the Secretary appointed a number of persons belonging to Brahmin community to key positions in the Association misunderstanding developed. These appointments were viewed by E V. R. as another ruse of Brahmins to promote their interests in organizations sponsored by the Indian National Congress So, in the name of reorganisation E. V. R. aimed at undoing what Santhanam had done. But Santhanam outflanked him by using his influence with Gandhi, and frustrated E. V. R.'s efforts.

## Temple Administration Issue

The Justice Party Ministry's attempt to regulate the temple administration and the Brahmin's opposition to it was also another factor that changed his mind. The Justice Ministry had attempted to regulate the administration of the temples and mutts or monastic chapters that dotted the Madras Country side. It had long been recognized that such a measure was necessary to correct the abuse of powers by committees and individuals placed in charge of Hindu endowment funds and to eliminate the costly law suits that resulted from this

56 *Kudi Arasu,* 21 November, 1926.

57 *Ibid*, 22 November, 1926; *Kumaran*, 25 November 1925: *Vidudalai*, 1 June, 1954.

mal-administration. The Justice Party in which there were many practicing Hindus, had always included in its programme the regularisation of endowments.[58] The Bill that was finally introduced in the Council was conservative and restrained. But coming after years of strict non-interference in religious endowments by the Madras Government which was anxious not to do anything that might be construed as a "desire on the part of the Government to meddle with the religious affairs of the Hindus" or to take over the "management of their properties",[59] the Bill was considered a radical departure. The Bill encountered much opposition not only from the members of the Council but from temples and mutts such as Chidambaram Temple, in Tamilnadu the Ashta Mutt at Udipi in Karnataka and famous Tirupati temple in Andhra Pradesh which were under Madras Presidency.[60]

Brahmin leaders in the Congress, like Sathiamoorthy and Srinivasa Iyengar, opposed this Act and wrote against it in the newspapers. Hence E. V. R., Varadarajulu Naidu, Tiru. Vi. Ka. and S. Ramanathan discussed among themselves and decided to issue a statement against the Brahmin leaders. Since there was no newspaper except Navasakthi to publish it they published their statement through it.[61] Rajaji approached these non-Brahmin leaders and advised them to refrain from such activities. But they questioned the acts of Sathiamoorthy and

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58 Tamilnadu Archives, Home (Miscellaneous), Ordinary Series, G. O. 169 January 22, 1919: Proceedings of the Tanjore -Tiruchinopoly Conference held on March 30 and 31, 1918.

See also the resolution passed at the Coimbatore Conference of the Justice Party on August 19, 1917 in T. Varadarajulu Naidu (Comp), *The Justice Movement*, 1917, Section II p. 21.

59 P. Ramanatha Iyer, *Madras Hindu Religious Endowment Act*, (Act II of 1927) (3rd Ed., Madras, 1946), p. 28.

60 Sami Chidambaranar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 90-91.

61 *Navasakthi*, 20 February, 1925.

Srinivasa Iyengar. Compromising both the parties a fresh statement was issued by Rajaji. Then only the wave on this issue stopped. Tnis was also a cause of E. V. R.'s anti-Brahmin attitude.[62]

## Personal Experiences

In the Tiruchy Conference some of the Congress member moved a censure motion against Varadarajulu Naidu, condemning him for endangering national unity by promoting communal feeling in Tamil society. E. V. R. spoke against the resolution and it was rejected by the conference. T. S. S. Rajan, Rajaji, N. S. Varadachari, K. Santhanam and Saminatha Sastri all the Brahmins submitted their resignations. This confirmed E. V. R.'s earlier belief that Brahmins whether traditionalists or progressives, would join together irrespective of the cause.[63]

The rigidity among orthodox Brahmins in the observance of social customs hurt the feelings of the non-Brahmins particularly E V. R. His personal experiences in the Congress

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62 In a letter to Tiru. Vi. Ka. E. V. R. contented that all Brahmins should not be considered selfish. only a few was like that. Unselfish Brahmins supported the Bill, he believed and so he conserved Tiru. Vi Ka. not to worry. *Navasakthi* 20 February, 1925; *Vidudalai*, 1 June, 1954.

63 Sami Chidambaranar *Op Cit.*, p. 90;
Criticising the Mylapore Brahmins, the song was sung in some quarters. They were criticised for their happiness about the exit of E. V. R. and others.

நாயக்கர் நாயுடாதியார் நகர்ந்ததாலே
காங்கிரஸ் காய்ந்தெடுத்த செம்பொன்போல்
களங்கமற்று விட்டதாம்
வாய்க்கு வந்தவாறு உளறும் மயிலைச்சீமான்
வாய்மதம் தேய்க்குமாறு செய்வீர் செகத்திரே.

"They think that the exit of Naicker (E. V. R.) and others had made the Congress as a pure gold. oh; try to destroy of their ego). Kovai Ayyamuthu, *Vaikom Enathu Ninaivukal*, (Vaikom, My thoughts), p. 25.

conferences and direct contact with Brahmin leaders of Congress bear testimony to it. E. V. R.'s attention was turned towards certain incidents such as follows: When a conference was held at Tirunelveli for the removal of untouchability, a non-Brahmin member, Govindasamy Nadar of Virudhunagar was asked to go and eat in a separate enclosure other than those of the Brahmins. Immediately he left the conference and set fire to the Khaddar clothes in the street.[64] Such a discrimination in a National Organisation could never be tolerated by persons like E. V. R. Not only in the case of Govindasamy Nadar but also in the case of other non-Brahmins, similar treatment was meted out in the conferences in the name of religion and traditions.[65] Tiru. Vi. Ka. also makes a reference to this. Though the Brahmins spoke in the same platforms, at the time of dining they had a separate dining halls for them.[66] A copy of the letter addressed by the people to Lord Pentland in 1892 and 1893 possessed by E. V. R. pointed out how in the political and social fields Brahmins were oppressing non-Brahmins. This sort of hatred for Brahmins was thus the result of a slow evolution in E. V. R.

E. V. R. himself narrated an event to show how far his Self-Respect was wounded in this question. Once when E. V. R. went with Srinivasa Iyengar to a Brahmin's house for dining, he was supplied food in a separate place and when he went again for lunch to the same place, the leaves used for serving morning tiffin were not even removed and in the same place he was again served meals. The leaves in which he ate both in the morning and afternoon were there till night meals was served. As he was a Sudra according to them, the mere touch of the leaves would lead to pollution.[67]

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64 *Unmai* (Truth), 1 May 1975.

65 S. Ramanathan, *Kuttuicci Gurusami Ninaivu Malar* p. 39.

66 Tiru. Vi. Ka. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 771 and 773.

67 *Kudi Arasu*, 12 July, 1931.

Similar incidents happened to him at various places. When E. V. R. and Venkatasamy Pillai went to a Brahmin's house[68] at Tanjore, they had the same experience. Naturally it wounded his feelings and hence a strong opposition for Brahminism developed in him later. This was not the case outside only but even inside the Jail the same treatment was meted out to Non-Brahmins. E. V. R. narrated an incident in which he proved that in the Cuddalore Jail, a separate cook was arranged for Brahmin prisoners. But for others it was alleged no such differences were maintained. This also wounded his heart much.[69]

## Emergence of the Self-Respect Movement

A survey of the political events between 1925 to 1926 would make us understand clearly the emergence of the Movement. The year 1925 was an important watershed in the politics of Tamilnadu. In April 1925 the Justice Party leader Theogaraya Chetti's death forced the Justice Party to search for new resources for leadership. In the Congress, the Non-Co-operation Movement which attracted E. V. R so much in the beginning gradually crumbled down and an alternative policy emerged. The protagonists of this policy came to be known as Swarajists. They argued that in constitutional rather than agitational methods lay the quickest and best path to national freedom and that the Congress should enter into the Legislature and Local Boards.

The core of the Swarajist Movement in the Province was headed by S. Satyamoorthy and S. Srinivasa Iyengar.[70] Though they reluctantly followed Gandhi and his Non-Co-operation Movement soon they joined with other dissidents of the Congress

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68 *Ibid.*

69 *Ibid.*, 26 June, 1926.

70 M. R. Jayakar, *The Story of My Life*, (Bombay, 1958), p. 487.

to lay the foundation of the All India Swarajya Party.[71] The stand of Swarajists against Gandhi was disliked by E. V. R. He felt that Council entry would make the Congress unfit for the realisation of the Gandhian ideals of removal of untouchability, Khaddar and other reforms. He was of the impression that Non-Co-operation alone would bring social change. His opposition to the Swarajists was further strengthened by the Brahmanical attitude of S. Srinivasa Iyengar the leader of the Swarajists of Madras. His animosity towards Swarajists slowly turned into an enmity towards Brahmins because they dominated the Swarajist Party and opposed him in every one of his policies. Congress which was also dominated by the Brahmins could not accommodate the ideas of E. V. R. Though there was in the Congress Brahmin, non-Brahmin feeling in general, it came to a head only in 1925 in the Conjeevaram Conference. Though E V. R. was displeased with the Tamilnadu Congress leaders, his faith in Gandhi was firm upto 1927. At a place called Siravayal he declared open a "Common Well" and named it "Gandhi Well" to indicate that all communities can take water from it.[72] His belief in Gandhi made him not to resign or cut himself away finally from the Congress.

Although E. V. R. had become disenchanted with the Congress since the Conjeevaram Conference in 1925 he had no specific plan for his future activities. After 1925 E. V. R. did not resign but in Kudi Arasu he wrote that he was expecting his expulsion from Congress. He himself explained the reason for not resigning namely to be in the Congress and change its nature. He wanted to abolish the dominance of Brahmins in it and revive the old Gandhi Congress.[73] In a report published by Swadesamitran, it was stated that he was expelled from the Congress. Immediately in a rejoinder he pointed out that he was not expelled

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71 *Navasakthi*, 5 January, 1923.

72 *Kumaran*, 31 March, 1926.

73 *Kudi Arasu*, 13 June, 1926.

but he himself came out of it voluntarily.[74] Since he did not participate in the deliberations of the Executive Committee, as per Rule 15 of the Congress, he was considered to be a non-member and another member was appointed in his place. Neither he cared about it nor worried. He hoped that Gandhi would emerge out successfully against the Swarajists. But events did not make a dramatic turn as he expected and Gandhi too had to yield to the pressures of the Swarajists.

The failure of his hopes in the Congress made him to draw a new line of approach. This led to the birth of the Self-Respect Movement. But it was not a pre-planned one. It was purely accidental. His activities during 1925 to 1929 would prove that he adopted that line of action to sheer force of circumstances.[75]

Many of his colleagues including Rajaji wanted him to be in the Congress and fight for the cause of Non-Brahmins. But he did not like that idea for the above reason. In this circumstances he was left with two alternatives. Either as suggested by Tiru. Vi. Ka and other non-Brahmin leaders, he could have continued with the Tamilnad Congress and strengthened the hands of the progressive elements both in the Brahmin and non-Brahmin groups in their attempts to eradicate social inequalities, or he could have inaugurated a new organization specifically to fight the then prevailing sectarian social practices. As he believed the first alternative was impossible in his lifetime, he chose the second and founded a new organization.[76] E. V. R. cut off from the Congress and gravitating towards the Justice, he was laying the foundation of a dynamic social movement that has come to be styled as the Self-Respect Movement.

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74 *Kudi Arasu*, 29 August, 1926.

75 *Ibid.*, 24 January, 1927.

76 E. Sa. Viswanathan, *The Political Career of E. V Ramasami Naicker: A Study in the Politics of Tamilnad* 1920-1949; unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation, Canberra, 1973.

## The Term Self-Respect

The term 'Self-Respect' corresponds to the Tamilised form of the Sanskrit word 'Suyamariathai'. It is a combination of two words 'Suya' which means 'Self' and 'Mariathai', which means 'respect'. It is quite interesting to note that E. V. R. who later on detested Sanskrit adopted the Sanskrit name for his new Party. There is no mention of the word 'Suyamariathai' either in the earliest available Tamil dictionary compiled by the Jesuit Antao De Proencas or the latest ones including the Madras University English-Tamil Dictionary.[77] Though this word has not been given in the Tamil Lexican of the University of Madras, as a main word, it is found as the meaning of the word 'Thanmathippu' and is referred to as a word of modern usage.

As this word was often used by E. V. R. in his speeches and conversations, it may be worthwhile to find out how he began to adopt it. It was possible for him to have adopted it from Gandhi. As an ardent follower of Gandhi, he wanted to walk in his footsteps with reverence. Every word of Gandhi was like a mantra, followed sincerely by E. V. R. The earliest reference to the word 'Suyamariathai' is noticed in Tiru. Vi. Ka.'s Navasakthi in the year 1922.[78] Rajaji wrote in 'Young India' that one must be prepared to sacrifice everything that stand in the way of Self-Respect.[79] It was first called by the following titles: 'Parppanarallathar Suyamariathai Sangam' (Non-Brahmin Self-Respect League), 'Parppanarallathar Valibar Suyamariathai Sangam' (Non-Brahmin Youth

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77 S. Thani Nayagam, Antao De Proencas Tamil-Portuguese Dictionary, A. D. 1679, (Kuala-lumpur, 1966).

78 *Navasakthi*, 14 July, 1922; *Kumaran*, 3 July, 1930;
K. A. P. Viswanatham remarked that for this Sanskrit word in Tamil is 'Tannurimai Iyakkam'.

79 *Navasakthi*, 14 July, 1922.

Self-Respect League). Later it was called in short form as 'Suyamariathai Iyakkam' (Self-Respect Movement).

## Motive

The mot ve behind inauguration of the Self-Respect Movement was nothing but E. V. R.'s contempt for caste system and its evils. His bitter experiences in the Congress were also responsible for its emergence. E. V. R.'s break with Congress in 1925 came essentially as a result of his show down with the Brahmin Leaders who were opposed to reforms. Their conservatism and faith in traditions were the strength of E. V. R's stand This led to a clevage between Brahmins and non-Brahmins which he made the basis for all his propaganda. He was of the opinion that the Congress had given benefits to the Brahmins and discredit to the non-Brahmins.[80] The Self-Respect Movement was dedicated to the goal of giving non-Brahmins a sense of pride based on their Dravidian past which also meant denial of the superiority of the Brahmins whom he described as representative of the Aryans. Unlike the Justice Party, the Self-Respect Movement was popular in its appeal. Though it began as a social reform movement its effects were felt in the political field also.[81]

## Date

The exact date in which the movement was started and the place of its birth cannot be categorically stated because leaders of the Movement express different opinions about such questions. Proper source materials are also not available for deciding such problems, definitely. It is known that as a prelude to the formation of this Movement E V R. toured the Tamil country widely and did propaganda work. At that

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80 *Kudi Arasu*, 7 November, 1926.

81 Engene F. Irschick, *Op. Cit.*, p. 330.

time no one was aware that this would result in the emergence of a Movement.

Prominent leaders of the Movement suggest 1924, 1925, 1926 and 1927 as the years of the rise of the Movement. The present leaders of the Dravidar Kazhagam are of the opinion that this Movement originated from the time of E. V. R.'s controversy over the communal representation question at Conjeevaram Congress Conference. That was the reason why they celebrated the Golden Jubilee (50th year) of the Self-Respect Movement in the year 1976. In a recent publication of Periyar E. V. R.'s speeches and writing, the editor in his preface remarks that the release of E V. R.'s paper 'Kudi Arasu' should be taken as the date of the birth of the Movement i. e. 2 May, 1925.[82]

Even E. V. R. was not able to say anything definitely as to the date of its birth. He wrote in Kudi Arasu dated 13 January, 1929 that within three years of its emergence the Self-Respect Movement had attracted the attention of everyone. So according to this view, the probable date of origin of this Movement is 1926. When writing about it in 1927, he remarked, "when an organization called 'Self-Respect' Movement was inaugurated people talked about it indifferently. But now it had become acceptable to all''. So it is clear that this Movement was started even before 1927[83] Further he remarked in the same year that there was great opposition to the Movement when it was inaugurated.

Thus the starting of Kudi Arasu cannot be taken as the date of origin of the Self-Respect Movement. The Kudi Arasu was released by one Saivite saint Sri. La. Sri. Tiruppathirippuliyur Gnaniar Swamigal. E. V. R. who was not a believer in blessings in the later days sought his blessings. In the welcome address

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82 Anaimuthu (Editor), *Periyar E. V. R. Sinthanaigal*, Vol. I, Introduction.

83 *Kudi Arasu*, 4 December, 1927.

E. V. R remarked that his paper would work also for religious development. His speech and reverence to Swamigal could be seen in the First Issue of Kudi Arasu. E. V. R. was a believer in God and religion upto 1927 and there was no doubt about this. At the time of the inception of Kudi Arasu E. V. R. continued to be an ardent Congress man. He was also not involved in any serious controversies either with the other members of the Congress or with Gandhi. Though he had his differences with V. V. S. Iyer in the Gurukulam issue, he condoled his sudden demise due to an accident at Courtallam. He even went to the extent of praying to the Lord Almighty for his soul to rest in peace. He had confessed that V. V. S. Iyer was also a non-sectarian. Not only the demise of V. V S. Iyer but the death of a prominent Congress member, Krishna Sarma was also prominently published in Kudi Arasu There he had published an article on Subramania Bharatiyar, the Brahmin poet and also some of the articles written by Brahmins. So the birth of Kudi Arasu can not be taken as the date of the emergence of the Movement.

Another instance could be cited to prove that the Movement was started before 1927. On 14 August, 1927 Kudi Arasu, there is a news item about the visit of E. V. R. to Dana Vysia Nadu. The news item is worded as "Vaikom Hero and the leader of the Self-Respect Movement E. V. R. visited". It thus indicated the origin and spread of the Movement before 1927. It also points out that the Movement was established before his meeting with Gandhi.

Moreover the month of July 19 and 20, 1926 E. V. R., Tiru. Vi. Ka., Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu and R. K. Shanmugam Chettiar met to decide the line of action to be taken by them in tune with the political situation then prevailing in Tamilnadu. They decided that as regards the political matters one's ideas should not bind the other, while in the principle of social equality they must follow the same ideology.[84] Thus

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84 *Ibid*, 25 July, 1926; *Kumaran*, 23 September, 1926.

1926 may be taken as the year in which the Self-Respect Movement originated.

As the first step to put into practice the ideals of Self-Respect Movement it was resolved to avoid Brahmin purohits in the social ceremonies. The names of those who had thus avoided the Brahmins or willing to avoid them such were published regularly in the Kudi Arasu. As a corollary to the first list was the names of E. V. R., Dr. Naidu, Tiru. Vi. Ka., R. K. S. Chettiar, J. S. Kannappar, N. Thandapani Pillai etc., were published. But the name of S. Ramanathan who was a very close friend of E. V. R. and Secretary of the Self-Respect Movement was not there in this list.[85] It was decided to propagate this ideal through conferences and meetings. This can be considered as a step taken first for the establishment of the Self-Respect Movement. As per this at the time of the death of the wife of E. V. Krishnasamy, his brother E. V. R. made arrangements to conduct the obsequies on Vaishnava line without a Brahmin Purohit.[86]

## Founder

The real founder of the Self-Respect Movement was none other than E. V. R. Once S. Ramanathan wrote : "I sponsored the Movement and was its General Secretary. But I was comparatively young and inexperienced. So we all crowned E. V. R. Periyar as the leader."[87] On the strength of this statement it was believed that "unable to toe the line of the Justice Party. Naicker had no other alternative but to strengthen the Self-Respect League founded by S Ramanathan, one of the articulate young non-Brahmin members in the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee."[88]

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85 *Ibid*, 8 August, 1926.

86 E. V. R. was born in a Hindu, non-Brahmin Vaishnava family. Sami Chidambaranar, *Tamilar Talaivar*, p. 27.

87 S. Ramanathan, 'Self-Respect Movement' in *Kuttucci Gurusamy Ninaivu Malar* (Madras, 1966), p. 39; *Gandhi and the Youth*, (Madras, 1947), p. 23.

88 E. Sa. Viswanathan, *Op. Cit.*,

It is true that he was with E. V. R. in moving the Communal Representation Resolution. But while E. V. R. cut off his connections with the Congress except for holding the primary membership, S. Ramanathan became the secretary of the All India Spinners Association in 1926.[89] E. V. R. was critical about Ramanathan and wrote in Kudi Arasu against a statement issued by the latter regarding the functioning of the 'Khadi Board'. When S. Ramanathan stated that 50% of appointments in the Khadi Board was held by non-Brahmins, E. V. R. in an article gave data of the number of Brahmins and non-Brahmins in the Production, Administration and Sales Departments of the Khadi Board and refuted the statement point blank.[90] It had been seen earlier S. Ramanathan did not come into the picture when the first step was taken regarding the organisation of the Self-Respect Movement.

The statement that "The League was not very active till 1927; neither Naicker nor Ramanathan was in a position to devote attention to it"[91] does not also seem to be based on facts. It would be seen from the following pages of this chapter that E. V. R. was very active during 1926 and 1927 with the Self-Respect Movement. E. V. R. continued to have close relationship with the Justice Party even after starting his Self-Respect Movement. K. A. P. Viswanatham, a staunch Justicite closely associated with E. V. R. in all his activities has also pointed out this fact.[92] The participation of the Justice Leaders in the state conference held in 1929 further proves the above point.

A section of the Tamil society strongly believed that Tiru. Vi. Ka. was fundamentally responsible for the birth of this new Movement Once when Tiru. Vi. Ka. was proceeding to Navalur

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89 S Ramanathan, *Gandhi and Youth*, pp. 21-22.

90 *Ooliyan*, 27 September, 1927; *Kudi Arasu*, 9 October, 1927.

91 E. Sa Viswanathan, *Op. Cit.*,

92 K. A. P. Viswanatham, personal interview, Trichy, 18 April, 1975 with the author.

Samarasa Sanmarga Sangha Conference, with N. M. Venkatasamy Nattar, the Tamil Scholar, the latter remarked that though Tiru. Vi. Ka. endeavoured to point out the evils that crept into Hindu Religion, it was misused by E. V. R. for the propagation of Self-Respect Movement.[93] But Tiru. Vi. Ka. cannot be regarded as directly responsible for the Movement.

E. V. R. in 1926 remarked : "In all the activities of your life you have a belief that Brahmins are superior to you and so this idea must be rejected by everyone". For the propagation of such an idea he requested the young men to set up non-Brahmin youth organizations.[94] He further reiterated that if the Congress or any other organization was prepared to grant Self-Respect and independence to its members he would be in the first rank of that organization and if he felt that any organization was detrimental to the Self-Respect and independence of the people he would not hesitate to destory it. To achieve this aim, he said that he was prepared to incur any amount of abuse or shame.[95]

M. K. Reddy when addressing the Chingleput Conference in 1929 remarked that E. V. R. was the founder of the Movement[96] When unveiling the portrait of E. V. R. at the Tirunelveli conference, S. N. D. P., Yogam, General Secretary, recollected the part played by E. V. R in the Vaikom Satyagraha and remarked that after that E. V. R. founded the Self-Respect Movement.[97] E. V. R. himself declared in 1930 that he was the founder of the Movement.[98] In his weekly Kudi Arasu, he had referred to the Self-Respect Movement in several articles as "the Movement of mine" and "the movement which

93 Tiru. Vi. Ka., *Op. Cit.*, p. 188

94 *Kudi Arasu*, 19 September, 1926.

95 *Ibid.*, 7 November, 1926.

96 *Ibid.*, 29 December, 1929.

97 *Kudi Arasu*, 18 August 1929.

98 *Dravidan*, 5 September, 1930.

was started by me".[99] All these facts go to prove that E. V. R. was the sole architect to the Self-Respect Movement.

When addressing a meeting, Sir A. Ramasami Mudaliar remarked that E V. R. was the first person to say that to free oneself from the atrocities of the purohitar was the first step towards Self-Respect. He further wanted the propaganda to reach the whole of India.[100] E. V. R. felt the need for the establishment of a regular Association or Organization for upholding the Self-Respect of the non-Brahmins. He came to this conclusion after he had undertaken the propaganda work in the various parts of Tamilnadu and returned to Erode.[101] In response to his propaganda several thousand people expressed their appreciation of his stand through letters. Some of them even sent small amounts as donations.[102]

## Establishment of the Self-Respect League

The year 1926 witnessed the establishment of Self-Respect Leagues all over Tamilnadu. It may be asked why he did not inaugurate this Movement immediately after the Conjeevaram Conference of 1925 and why he waited upto 1926. Of course the plan for the establishment of a movement was hatched even in 1925. The Hindu Religious Endowments Act paved the way for it. As it had been pointed out earlier this was an act to regulate the administration of the many temples and mutts and monastic chapters that dotted the Madras countryside. The Orthodox Brahmins opposed the Bill as an attack upon Hindu religion. They continued their opposition even after it was finally passed as the Hindu Religious Endowment Act of 1925. E. V. R. felt that in the interest of the public, opposition to this Act

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99 "The Movement inaugurated by E. V. R. two years before had spread like a wild fire" - *Kudi Arasu*, 19 August, 1926.

100 *Kudi Arasu*, 10 July, 1927.

101 *Ibid.*, 31 October, 1926.

102 *Ibid.*, 5 December, 1926.

should be curbed. He felt that if he kept quiet it would mean that he was afraid of the criticism of the Brahmins and he wanted to explain to the whole Hindu community the fruitfulness of the Act. So he wanted a central body to carry on propaganda work against Brahmin criticism. Hence he wrote to Tiru. Vi Ka- and Dr. Naidu to organize an executive body to carry out his plan. He said that he was prepared to co-operate with them whether it was established in Madras or any other place. He considered it very urgent. This letter was published in the newspapers.[103] He was advised by some of his friends that it would be better if he started the Movement after the 1926 elections. Therefore he reserved his activities till the end of the election. After the election, eminent people from Tirunelveli, Madurai. Tiruchi and Ramanathapuram requested him to visit their places for the formation of the Self-Respect Leagues. Hence E. V. R. visited Tiruchi on 28-11-1926, Tirunelveli on 29-11-1926, Tenkasi on 30-11-1926, Tuticorin on 1-12-1926 and Madurai on 2-12-1926 and returned Erode on 3-12-1926.[104]

At Tiruchi under the name "Parppanarallathar Suyamariathai Sangam" an organization, was formed in one Kaliaperumal Naidu's house. E. V. R. was accompanied by K. A. P. Viswanatham for its formation.[105] On 29 November when he arrived at Tirunelveli, Ramanatha Desikar presented the manuscripts and pamphlets relating to Self-Respect Movement to E. V. R. who corrected and modified them. On the same day a public meeting was addressed at Town Railway Station Road. E V. R. requested all non-Brahmins to support the Self-Respect Movement. Dalavay Ramasami Mudaliar, Theetharappa Mudaliar, Kootha Nayinar, Gomathinayagam Pillai, Veerapathira Pillai and Mahalingam Pillai were some of those prominent men of Tirunelveli who took part in it.

103 *Kumaran*, 18 February, 1925.

104 *Kudi Arasu*, 5 December, 1926.

105 *Ibid*, K A. P. Viswanatham, personal interview, Trichy, 15 January, 1975 with the author.

All oi them were high Caste Hindus. At Tenkasi it was inaugurated on 30 November when one Meenakshisundaram Pillai was made the Secretary. Further discussions on the Movement were held at Palaniappa Mudaliar's house. On 1 December, when a meeting was organised at Tuticorin Kumarasami Pillai, and Muthukkaruppa Pillai were selected as President and Secretary respectively. The propriety of the participation of the Pillai's in the Movement was questioned by a Brahmin who attended the meeting. He contended that the Pillai's were as orthodox as the Brahmins in observing social restrictions. E. V. R. replied to this charge. At Madurai Muthukkamatchi Mudaliar of Kambikkudi near Madurai organised the Self-Respect League with the help of Uthamapalayam M. T Subramania Mudaliar. There he spoke in a public meeting also and explained what Self-Respect was.[106]

In continuation of the above initial activities of the Movement, people in other places either invited E. V. R. to inaugurate the League in their respective areas or voluntarily formed it in quick succession. On second January 1927 at Pattukkotai under the Presidentship of Venugopal Naidu, 'Pattukkottai Parppanar-allathar Suyamariathai Sangam' (Pattukkottai non-Brahmin Self-Respect League) was formed.[107] In Dharmapuri, Sennimalai and other places the League was started.[108] Though it did not contain the word 'Self-Respect' in the title, everyone understood that it was a part of the Movement.

After the establishment of the League in many places, Taluk and District Conferences came to be organized. Before the commencement of every conference, E. V. R. toured the areas for a week or two and mobilised support for the success of the

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106 *Kudi Arasu*, 5 December, 1926; P. T. Rajan, personal interview, Madras, 6 June, 1973 with the Author (M. T. Subramania Mudaliar was his uncle).

107 *Kudi Arasu*, 30 January, 1927.

108 *Ibid.*, 23 January, 1927; also *Ibid*, 6 February, 1927.

Conferences [109] During this period E. V. R. had not developed anti-religious policy. When the Brahmins at Tenkasi opposed the rendering of Devaram hymns in the local temple and refused to enter the temple, E. V. R. severely criticised the attitude of the Brahmins and supported the officials who managed the temple affairs without the Brahmins.[110]

## First Annual Conference

The First Annual Conference held at Tirunelveli is worth mentioning E. V. R. who founded the organization at Tirunelveli was again invited to inaugurate the District Conference. The Conference was held on 28 November 1927. The Tamil scholar T. K. Chidambaranatha Mudaliar (T. K. C.) inaugurated the Conference and requested E. V. R. to preside over the function.[111] In this conference 32 resolutions were passed under the presidentship of E V. R.[112] As resolved in the conference, people began to discard Brahmins in their household ceremonies. The names of the individuals who had avoided the Brahmins were published in the Kudi Arasu continuously. Self-Respect marriages, Self-Respect death ceremonies came to be conducted widely. E. V. R. took the place of the priest in the conduct of certain Self-Respect marriages.

The first Self-Respect marriage which E. V. R. conducted took place at Sukkilanatham village, Aruppukkottai Taluk, Ramnad District. In this marriage the bridegroom married two ladies. The marriage was celebrated by seating both the ladies on either side of the groom. E. V. R. who was accompanied by K. A. P. Viswanatham, J. S. Kannappar, Pattukkottai Alagirisami, S V. Lingam, N. Thandapani Pillai and Subramania Pillai was given a rousing welcome and from the railway station

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109 *Ibid*., 6 May, 1928.

110 *Ibid*., 12 December, 1926.

111 *Ibid*, 4 December, 1927; *Kumaran*, 1, 8 December, 1927.

112 *Ibid*., 11 December, 1927. *Appendix III*.

to the marriage hall he was taken in a decorated chariot.[113] In the marriage hall E. V. R. prayed the Almighty to bless the couple. The married couple were asked by E. V R., to take an oath in the name of the Almighty. Not only the prayer to Almighty was made but also in the traditional way Ammi Mithithal and Arunthathi Parthal ceremonies were performed.[114]

## Meaning of Self-Respect

E. V. R. had fully explained the meaning of Self-Respect and the reasons for its emergence. "The Self-Respect Movement was inaugurated not for talking ill of a particular community or sect, but to destroy the social evils as a whole"[115] E. V. R. was interested more in social freedom than in winning political independence. He desired that social equality should be achieved before the British left India. He was of the opinion that the Congress paid only lip service to social equality and its plan of removal of untouchability was only in paper. He thought that these problems were not solved before the achievement of independence, the caste system and its evils would continue, for ever. He pointed out that social reform must precede political reform. Therefore instead

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113 "திருநாயக்கர்: 'மணமக்களும் சுற்றத்தாரும் எல்லாப் பேரும் பெற்று இன்பமாய் நீடூழி வாழவேண்டும்' என்று எல்லாம் வல்ல சக்தியை இறைஞ்சி ஆசீர்வதிக்கும்படியாய் வேண்டிக் கொண்டார்". நாயககர் மணமக்களைப் பார்த்துச் சொல்லும் படி கேட்டுக் கொண்டதாவது: "எல்லாம் வல்ல சக்தியின் அருளால் நமது இல்லற வாழ்க்கைக்கு அரிய துணையாகத் தங்களைப் போற்றுகிறேன்".
*Kudi Arasu*, 3 June, 1928; *Dravidan* 28 May, 1928.

114 K. A P Viswanatham, personal interview, Madras, 18 April, 1976 with the author.
(Ammi Mithithal = Putting the leg on Ammi (grinder)
Arunthathi Parthal = Seeing the star Arunthathi.
These denotes the virtuous woman according to Purana)
These blind beliefs were later rejected by the Self-Respecters.

115 *Kudi Arasu*, 2 August, 1931.

of joining the political organization, he started the social reform movement called the Self-Respect Movement.[116]

When E. V. R. named it as 'Self-Respect League' it was remarked by some whether it would not be mistaken as an association of the persons who had no Self-Respect. E. V. R. retorted by asking whether it meant that any one who had formed the Samadharma Party (Socialist Party) was not a Samadharmists (Socialists), or a member of the Ahimsa Association had no Ahimsa principle and a member of the Justice Party had no justice. Then finally he said that even if it meant so, there was nothing wrong in it, since this movement was started only for those who had lost their Self-Respect in the society and who wanted to regain the same. He said that he named it as Self-Respect Movement only to[117] abolish all blind beliefs in religion and to rationalize the social life. He believed that Self-Respect was essential for political as well as social life. E. V. R. declared that after careful analyse of the history of the various nations he found that only self-respect and rationalistic spirit have led them to success. According to him even Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj were established by the Brahmins only to safeguard their own self-respect. So the non-Brahmins, had a right to start counter associations to avoid those practices which were against their Self-Respect[118] Therefore he named his Movement as "Self-Respect Movement". It was later on interpreted that the Self-Respect Movement was started to lead the whole of humanity towards Self-Respect.

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116 *Ibid.*, 19 December, 1926.
117 *Ibid*, 17 February, 1929.
118 *Ibid.*, 19 December, 1926.

3

# Development of the Self-Respect Movement 1926-1931

## E. V. R. and the Justice Party

E. V. R. was gravitating towards the Justice Party. His weekly Kudi Arasu gave prominence to Justice Party news. But E. V. R. declined the invitation of K. A. P. Viswanatham who was a young prominent member of the Justice Party to join that party.[1] Though not actually a Justicite he was aligning his creed unofficially with that party. Though he had inaugurated the Self-Respect Movement indecision still prevailed in him. He was not in a position

1 *Kudi Arasu*, 13 Feb., 1927 and 5 June 1972; *Dravidan*, 28 Dec. 1929; K. A. P. Viswanatham, personal interview, Madras, 18 January, 1916 with the author.

to decide whether to go along with his Movement or joining the Justice Party. His indecision was quite evident from his activities in 1926 and 1927 for he had on the one hand continued with his membership in the Tamilnadu Congress and on the other participated in the meetings arranged by the Justice Party. Between 1926 and the first half of 1927 E. V. R. attended all important meetings of the Justice Party in order to acquaint himself with its activities. This was resented by some of the leading Congressmen including Tiru. Vi. Ka. who charged E. V. R. with anti-Congress propaganda while remaining in the Congress.[2] E. V. R. began to oppose the Congress vehemently after 1926.[3] This became evident at the Legislative Council election of 1926. As the Congress decided to boycott the elections, the Swarajya Party consistent with its policy of Council entry decided to contest the election.[4]

First, instead of openly canvassing, E. V. R. urged the voters through the columns of Kudi Arasu to vote for competent candidates, presumably non-Brahmin candidates, who would be willing to sacrifice personal interests to serve the cause of non-Brahmins. Later he openly asked the people to vote for the Justice Party. He pointed out that the Justice Party's victory alone would give relief to the non-Brahmins. He further reiterated that to demolish the Brahmin supremacy, Justicites should be helped.[5]

The Justice Party lost the elections but made no attempt to bring new life to the party after the election defeat. They felt that their political career was over once for all. E. V. R. who was not an admirer of the political aspirations of the Justice Party supported their efforts to improve the general status of the non-Brahmins. He utilised this opportunities to keep the

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2 Tiru. Vi. Ka., *Op. Cit*, p. 388.

3 Sami Chidambaranar, *Op Cit.*, p. 97.

4 *Kudi Arasu*, 26 September, 1926; *Ibid*, pp. 95-97.

5 *Kudi Arasu*, 26 September, 1926.

spirit of the non-Brahmin leaders. His infusion of spirit led to the formation of a Confederation of non-Brahmins at Madurai.[6] This new line of action helped E. V. R. to be in close touch with various prominent non-Brahmins in the districts and taluks. This accelerated the development of the Movement. At the Madurai Confederation he made them to adopt a number of popular Congress policies. The Conference Pandal was decorated with placards reading "Long Live Mahatma Gandhi." This he did so on the hope that the Congress would become one day a Gandhi Congress championing the cause of social reform. At the same Confederation M T. Subramania Mudaliar opened a Khaddar exhibition. All over Tamilnadu several non-Brahmin Conferences (Parppanarallathar Mahanadu) were held E V. R. by participating in them strengthened his Movement.[7]

The Justice Conference held at Mayavaram in Tanjore district the following May (1927) was named as Self-Respect Conference.[8] E. V. R. himself moved a resolution that clearly enunciated the aims of his Self-Respect Movement namely to discontinue the observance of caste distinctions, not to employ Brahmin priests for officiating marriage and other ceremonies and throwing open the temples and public roads, tanks and wells to all persons.[9]

This resolution was put to practice on the same day. To implement the resolution K. A. P. Viswanatham with a thousand people belonging to all castes attempted temple entry. This was the first bold step taken in this direction in Tamilnad. When the news of their march to the temple reached the authorities

6 Eugene Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India* p. 315.

7 *Ibid.*, Op. Cit , p. 315.

8 *Kumaran*, 19 May, 1927.

9 *Hindu*, 11 May, 1927; *Dravidan* 12 May, 1927; *Swadesamitran* 10 May, 1927.

they suddenly closed the front entrance. But the processionists did not worry as the side entrance was kept opened. They entered into the temple through the side entrance. As the sanctum sanctorium was closed they like Saint Appar who had sung a song to open the closed door at Tirumaraikkadu, sang the same song.[10] But this time the doors didn't open and then they burnt camphor in the traditional way outside and broke the coconuts in reverence. It is quite interesting to note here that the followers of E. V. R. who broke the idols in late 40s and 50s worshipped deities with full respect and sanctity in 1927. After the worship the trouble started When they were returning from the temple, a mob arrived with sticks and brickbats and surrounded them. The side entrance was bolted from outside. So when the mob pelted stones they had to hide themselves by the side of the wall. K. A. P. Viswanatham who was leading this batch was also responsible for conducting temple entry successfully at Tiruvanaikka Jambukesvara Temple and Rockfort Temple. At Tiruchi the volunteers successfully violated 144 prohibitory order. Since more than 50,000 people witnessed this agitation and as K. A. P. V. belonged to a respectable family he was not arrested.[11]

E. V. R. attended the Justice Special Conference held at Coimbatore in July 1927.[12] He followed the proceedings closely

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10 பண்ணினேர் மொழியாளுமை பங்கரோ
மண்ணினார் வலஞ்செய் மறைக்காடரோ
கண்ணினாலுமைக் காணக் கதவினைத்
திண்ணமாகத் திறந்தருள் செய்ம்மினே.

ஈண்டு செஞ்சடை யாகத்து ஈசரோ
மூண்ட கார்முகிலின் முறிக்கண்டரோ
ஆண்டுகொண்ட நீரேயருள் செய்திடும்
நீண்ட மாக்கத வின்வலி நீக்குமே.

Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Arulicheytha Devara Tiruppathikangal, (Dharmapuram 1961) pp. 65-70.

11 *Dravidan*, 4 May, 1927 and *Ibid.*, 13 May, 1927, *Swadesamitran*, 10 May, 1927; K. A P. Viswanatham, personal interview, Tiruchi on 18 April, 1976 with the author; *Kumaran*, 7 July, 1927.

12 *Navasakthi*, 6 July 1927.

to evaluate the Justicites attitude to the changing nature of the country. As distinguished non-Brahmin leaders Tiru. Vi. Ka., P. Varadarajulu Naidu, E. V. R. had been invited to participate in the business of the Conference and even to take sides on whether or not Justice members should be allowed to join Congress.[13] E.V.R. who was very outspoken made a strong speech condemning the Governor of Madras for appointing C. P. Ramasami Iyer, a Brahmin as law member of the Executive Council; he even sought to introduce a resolution urging the recall of the Governor, but friends prevailed upon him to tone down his language and to withdraw the recall motion.[14] The happenings in the above Conference did not satisfy E.V.R. They were concerned more with drawing up of plans to recapture political power after their election defeat than with indulging in polemics against Brahmins. E. V. R. had understood the prevailing mood in the Justice Party and decided not to join forces with that party as they would obstruct his own plans of bringing about social changes in the Tamil society.

There is a popular belief that the Self-Respect Movement carried on the traditions of the Justice Party. This belief is simply not true.[15] The Self-Respect Movement is a child of the Congress. But the claim of Tiru. Vi. Ka. was different. In his Autobiography called 'Tiru. Vi. Ka. Valkkaikurippukal' he remarked :

> "E.V.R.'s Self-Respect Movement was born
> out of my 'Sanmarga' (path of Truth).
> There was ninety percent concordance
> and only ten percent difference
> existed between them."

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13 *Ibid.*

14 *Hindu*, 7 July, 1972; Sami Chidambaranar, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 99–100; *Navasakthi*, 6 July 1927.

15 But it was founded only with the association of the Justice Party – M. P A. Soundarapandian's speech. Reported in *Kumaran* 21 October, 1935. He had further remarked that until they gain support to enter into politics this must utilize the co-operation of the Justice Party. *Ibid.*

He further remarked that the nature of E V R would never attract him towards the Justice Party. But only his anger towards the Congress Party made him to lean towards Justice Party. There were always two sections in the Congress, one consisting of the high castes which emphasised political freedom and the other consisting of the lower castes which thirsted after social freedom In South India the first consisted mostly of Brahmins and the second of the other castes. There was always a schism between these two sections which came to prominence at every Congress Conference and finally culminated in the birth of the Self-Respect Movement.[16]

## E. V. R. and Gandhi

E. V. R.'s attitude was hardened by a number of public utterances made by Gandhi on his visit to Tamilnadu in late 1927.[17] Most of Gandhi said was a repetition of his remarks on previous visits and were not new. In April 1921 he told a meeting in Madras that "In Madras I have not a shadow of doubt that

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16 S. Ramanathan, *Kuttucci Gurusami Ninaivu Malar*, p. 36.

17 "Varna means predetermination of the choice of man's profession. The law of varna is that a man shall follow the profession of his ancestors for earning his livelihood. Every child naturally follows the 'colour' of his father or chooses his father's profession. Varna therefore is in a way the law of heredity. Varna is not a thing that were superimposed on Hindus, but men who were trustees for their welfare discovered the law for them. It is not a human invention but an immutable law of nature - the statement of a tendency that is even present and at work like Newton's law of gravitation Just as the law of gravitation existed even before it was discovered. so did the law of varna. It was given to the Hindus to discover that law. By this discovery and application of certain laws of nature, the people of the... .. have easily increased their material possessions. Similarly, Hindus by their discovery of this irressistible social tendency have been able to achieve in the spiritual field what no other nation in the world has achieved" - M. K. Gandhi, Varnashramadharma (Ahemedabad, 1962), *Navasakthi*, 12 September, 1927; *Young India*, 29 September, 1927, p. 329.

Hinduism owes its all to great traditions that the Brahmins have left for Hinduism... The Brahmins have declared themselves and they ought to remain the custodians of the purity of our life."[18] Four years later in March 1925, before the Conjeevaram Conference of 1925 Gandhi said in Madras, "If you follow Varnasramadharma in its spirit, we shall cease to be purely individuals and we shall walk in the fear of God."[19] E V. R.'s reaction to this was not revealed from the available records. If he had totally came to the belief that Gandhi was the champion of Varnashramadharma he would not have shown the continued faith in Gandhi. Even after these utterances which he might be aware he continued to have more faith only in Gandhi than Congress. By this time in 1927 E. V. R. had cut off all his connections with Congress and if at all he had any connection that was only due to his belief in Gandhi.

As the Movement gathered momentum E. V. R. felt that his connection with Gandhi might be a hindrance towards the realisation of his ideals of social justice. Therefore he decided to cut off his connections with Gandhi also. He began to feel that if untouchability had to be eliminated Gandhi should also be opposed. He said that for a long time he had waited and hidden the true meaning of the ideas of Gandhi to the outside world.[20]

Even before Gandhi's arrival in Madras, he remarked that Gandhi would be coming to Madras soon and would be talking about untouchability also and that his speeches would benefit the opposition group only. Therefore he declared that

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18 *Hindu*, 11 April, 1921; *Young India*, 6 October, 1921.

19 Eugene Irschick, *Op. Cit*, pp. 339-341.

20 *Kudi Arasu*, 17 August 1927 – But in the beginning of this year, he was eager to show Gandhi during his visit to Tamilnadu that his movement alone had worked for the welfare of the masses than the Congress and get his blessings – *Kudi Arasu*, 2 January, 1927

he would criticise Gandhi from then onwards.[21] This itself is a clean proof of his decision to fight Gandhi also. Gandhi's enunciation of his belief in Varnashramadharma during his visit to Madras alarmed E. V. R. To many non-Brahmins in the South, Varnashramadharma could mean only one thing; the superiority of Orthodox Brahmins over the rest of the population. They refused to consider what Gandhi really meant when he spoke of Varnashramadharma.

R K. Shanmugam Chettiar pointed out that Gandhi had not stopped at saying that the Brahmin, non-Brahmin problem was beyond his comprehension but had "proceeded to extol the hidden virtues of Varnashramadharma as he perceived them... whatever he imported into it, ordinary people would understand it only in one way, viz, the accepted Shastraic implication of the several rungs in the ladder of Hindu social polity"[22] E V R condemned the Varnashramadharma on the ground that in Tamilnadu it involved the relegation of all the non-Brahmin caste Hindus to the position of Sudras or Slaves and if each caste was to follow its own dharma, as Gandhi had suggested the non-Brahmin would be forced to serve the Brahmins.[23]

E. V. R. and his follower S. Ramanathan met Gandhi in September 1927.[24] They expressed their deep concern over Gandhi's statements and pointed out that this would only strengthen the orthodox Hindu position on the question of untouchability and child marriage, the two evils against which Gandhi himself was contending Neither were they able to convince Gandhi nor Gandhi was able to win them over to his way of thinking. E V. R. expressed his confirmed belief that

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21 *Ibid.*

22 *Hindu* (Weekly edition), 6 October, 1927.

23 Eugene Irschick, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 339-341.

24 '*Indu Mathamum Periyarum*' (Hindu Religion and Periyar), (Bavani, 1948), p. 17.

the ultimate freedom for India would be achieved only with the destruction of Indian National Congress, Hinduism and Brahminism.[25] His contention was that Gandhi was not able to understand Varnashramadharma as existing in Tamilnadu.

E. V. R. who had some faith in Gandhi and Khaddar began to denounce Gandhi and later Khaddar after this experience. It was really a strange development. The Kudi Arasu contained in the front page the phrase 'Mahatma Gandhi Vazhga' (Long Live Mahatma Gandhi). It was changed in the 20 November 1927 issue as 'Khaddar Vazhga' (Long Live Khaddar). Though he modified the saying in the first page, it continued to have Gandhi's picture in weaving posture. But from 25 December 1927 onwards it was also removed. E. V. R. who had with reverence and respect called Gandhi as Mahatma Gandhi began to call him as Sriman Gandhi (Mr. Gandhi). This attitude of E. V. R. was criticised by Varadarajulu Naidu.[26]

Thereafter E. V. R and Gandhi could not see eye to eye with each other. In the Satyagraha plan for the removal of Neil statue, he differed from Gandhi. He knew well that the Satyagrahis got the blessings of Gandhi. However it was considered by him as a blunder.[27] After he had decided to fight with Gandhi he was not prepared for any compromise. Even after the meeting with Gandhi, S. Ramanathan suggested to him whether they could meet Gandhi for the second time. As E. V. R. was not for any compromise, he refused for such a meeting.[28] He thoroughly understood Gandhi's conservative ideas of society and he took it as an opportunity to leave him once for all. In his inner most heart E. V. R. had another grievance against Gandhi which was not revealed outside. Gandhi wrote articles on Vaikom Satyagraha from 24 April

25 *Kudi Arasu*, 28 August, 1927.
26 *Tamilnadu*, 16 December, 1927.
27 *Kudi Arasu*, 16 October, 1927.
28 *Ibid.*, 18 August, 1927.

1924 to 11 January 1926 in Young India. But Gandhi in his article had not mentioned E V. R. or the part played by him in it even in a single place. This grievance of E V. R. was revealed to the author by K. A. P Viswanatham

In the years that followed Gandhi's 1927 visit to Tamilnadu the Self-Respect Movement began to take an alarming turn On a number of occasions the Manusmriti was burnt and the Rama-Ravana controversy was revised.[29] Several attempts were made by J. N Ramanathan and J. S. Kannappar to discredit Dharma Shastras. One of them burnt the Manusmriti in Madurai, Trichy and Madras.[30] One may astonish at this sudden change. But one who had understood E. V. R. knew his temperament. Once when he had decided, he would not allow for any compromise. There was no middle path but extreme step only.

Though he was engaged in the Varnashramadharma controversy, E. V. R. showed increasing interest in the trade union movement partly to spread the Self Respect ideology and partly to establish a rapport with the labour leaders opposed to the Congress. A prominent trade union leader and Member of Parliament Saklatwala came to Madras in February 1927. After his visit to many labour organizations all the leftist unions of Madras merged to form the Labour Political Party of Madras. The new party was the immediate cause for labour unrest in the presidency. Workers staged lightning strike in several industrial establishments and the most important was the strike staged by the workers of the Madras South, Maharatta and South Indian Railways. E. V. R. and his colleagues supported the strike, wrote articles in favour of them and even courted arrest.

However, the First Minister Subbarayan intervened and the case against E. V. R. and others was unconditionally withdrawn This labour problem drew the attention of the people towards the Self-Respect Movement.

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29 *Justice*, 12 June, 1928.
30 *Ibid.*, 14 June, 1928 and *Ibid.*, 7 July, 1928.

## Simon Commission and Self-Respect Movement

When the Simon Commission arrived at Madras in 1927, to study the political situation, it was boycotted by the Congress.[31]

But E V. R. approved the reasons given by the British Raj and urged non-Brahmin politicians to co-operate with the Commission.[32] Even though he was not based on relevant grounds E. V. R. characterised the Congress boycott of the Commission as a struggle between Brahmins and non-Brahmins. He warned the Justicites in his editorials in Kudi Arasu not to be carried away by the agitational tactics of the Congressmen and urged the former to extend full co-operation to make the Commission's work successful in Madras. He also hoped that the Congress opposition to the Commission was inimical to non-Brahmin's political interest.[33] For the success of that Commission in Madras, E. V. R. was fully responsible. 'Dravidan' criticised the stand of the Congress.[34] E. V. R. wrote several articles in support of the Commission and issued thousands of pamphlets.

## Independent Ministry and Self-Respect Movement

E. V. R.'s support for Dr. Subbarayan's Ministry was also coloured by his ideals social justice. E. V. R. saw in Subbarayan, a former Justicite, a reformer and a progressive Therefore he supported the Subbarayan Ministry through his writings in Kudi Arasu. In a large measure the independent Ministry headed by Dr. Subbarayan enjoyed the confidence of the Self-Respecters.

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31 In Madras a car was burned and a shop was bombed; then the police opened fire on a crowd, killing three persons. *Hindu*, 4 February, 1928; Eugene F. Irschick, *Op. Cit.*, p. 325.

32 *Kudi Arasu*, 11 December, 1927; and *Ibid.*, 26 February 1928.

33 *Ibid*.

34 *Dravidan*, 26, 27 December, 1927.

When E. V. R. clamoured for special privileges for non-Brahmins in the wake of the publication of the Memorandum forwarded to Royal Commission, the members of the Independent Ministry assured him that non-Brahmin interest would be adequately safeguarded by strictly implementing the principles in the Government order on communal representation in Governmental services.

It appears that E. V. R. and his followers were fully satisfied with this assurance and supported the Independent Ministry.[35] Dr. Subbarayan's unqualified support of the principles of the Movement, the personal friendship that existed between E. V. R. and Minister S. Muthiah Mudaliar and the Independent Ministry's conspicuous success in advancing social legislations were the reasons for the confidence of the Self—Respecters reposed with the Independent Ministry.

E. V. R felt that 10 years of Justice rule was equivalent to two years of his Movement's propaganda. He felt that even after the emergence of the Justice Party, the problem of non-Brahmin's was not properly understood and nobody was able to challenge the Brahmins.[36] But up to 1927 the Self—Respect Movement had no central organization. It was mainly concentrating on propaganda. E. V. R. was not satisfied with this development.

He planned for the enrolment of membership to the maximum number of 50, 000 before the arrival of the Royal Commission. He appointed certain individuals to strengthen the movement. E. V. R.'s followers also often stressed the need for a central organization. Their requests were published in Kudi Arasu with the view to gain support. Sami Chidambaranar wanted to have an organization like the religious missions and wrote to him accordingly. This letter too was published.[37] A lot of propaganda

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35 *Kumaran*, 21 February, 1929.
36 *Ibid.*, 17 February, 1929.
37 *Kudi Arasu*, 7 October, 1928.

work was undertaken during this period. Songs about the Self-Respect leaders were printed and distributed. Pamphlets were issued to explain the aims of the movement. Some novels and short stories too were written to propagate the ideals[38] The entire basis of Puranic Hinduism was questioned and Hindu religion itself was attacked as mere superstition. Swami Kaivalyam wrote a series of articles in 'Kudi Arasu' almost every week condemning the Puranic Hindu religion and its absurdities.[39]

Kanaga Subbu Rathinam alias Poet Bharatidasan, a disciple of the national poet Subramanya Bharati wrote inspirational poems in Tamil in which he gave expression to his belief in social reform.[40] As he had become the follower of E. V. R. in this period, he published many poems in the Self Respect magazines like Kudi Arasu, Puduvai Murasu etc.,[41] bearing mainly on social reforms.

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38 V. A. Sinnamanip Pakavataravarkal, *Suyamariyatai talaivarkal-mitu Kirtanangal* (Songs about Self-Respect leaders), Virudhunagar, 1930; one pamphlet, typical of many, which appeared, in 1929 was called *Visittira tevarkal Korttu* (Wonderful Court of Deities). It used the devise of a trial of all the Gods of the Hindu pantheon who were subjected in a court of law to severe cross-examination of all the sexual and violent crimes they had committed. Siva, Vishnu and many other deities were convicted – Eugene F. Irschick, *Op. Cit.*, p. 340.

39 Kaivalya Camiar, Kaivalya Camiar Katturaikal, (Essays of Kaivalya Sami) Second Ed., Madras, 1961.

40 Puratsik Kavingar Baratitasan, Baratitasan Kavitaikal (Bharati Dasan's poems) (Ramachandrapuram, 1961), Vol. I, pp. 87-101. Vol. II pp. 86, 216; Sathiyai Olikka Vali, (Trichy, 1971), p. 80. Also see *Appendix IV.*

41 He has served as editor of the following magazines: *Desa Sevakan, Atma Sakthi, Dupleix, Tai Nadu, Puduvai Murasu, Kavitha Mandalam and Kine.* In these magazines also he wrote poems on Self-Respect principles — M. Selvarasan, 'Baratitasan Oru Puratsik 'Kavingar' (Bharati Dasan, A Revolutionary Poet), (Madras, 1974), Madras University, Ph. D. Thesis.

## Chingleput Conference

The Most important of the early activities of the Self-Respect Movement was the convening of the First Provincial Self-Respect Conference at Chingleput on February 17, 1929. This conference gratified the wish of many who were anxious to constitute a central organization for the Movement. The Self-Respect leaders took this as an opportunity to assess the impact of their propaganda and to evolve a future programme. Though it was the Conference of Self-Respecters the majority of the participants hailed from the Justice Party. The flags which hung over the pandal were of the British Government.

P. T. Rajan, P. Subbarayan, M. K. Reddy, W. P. A. Soundara Pandian, M. Krishnan Nair, Panagal Raja, S. N. Arya, J. S Kannappar, A. Ramasami Mudaliar and many others were the prominent men who took part in the Conference.[42]

About three thousand people attended the Conference, which had something of a country fair.[43] Those who opposed the Self-Respect Movement complained that the big lake in Chingleput was spoiled and made muddy by the participants of the Conference.[44] An Agricultural Exhibition was opened by the Development Minister. There were pumping and well-boring demonstrations, and exhibits of many private firms.[45] Along with the Justice politicians rather curiously three or four Brahmins were also present. But the meeting was dominated only by the ideas and personality of E. V. R.

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42 *Kumaran*, 21 February, 1929; Kudi Arasu, Published the model sketch of the conference panthal. The place at Chingleput where this conference took place was named as Theogarayar Nagar and the conference hall was called 'Nair Mansion'.

43 Eugene F. Irschick, *Op. Cit.*, P. 341.

44 K. A. P. Viswanatham, personal interview at Tiruchi on 15 January 1975 with the author.

45 *Hindu*, 19 February, 1929.

Dr. P. Subbarayan, the Independent Chief Minister of the Madras Presidency, in his opening speech remarked :

> Religion as popularly understood among as Hindus is liable to make us selfish, as we are always urged by an ignorant priesthood to think of our individual soul and its salvation and not for our fellow-beings. We do not for a moment stop to consider that it ought to be the aim of every real religion to make the world a better one to live in. This we can do, not by considering only our own selves, but also the well-being of our fellow-creatures. But this is precisely what a civilization based on caste cannot do It is the idea of making society better, which is the central aim of the Self-Respect League.[46]

Since the main aim of Self-Respecters was to break this barrier of caste, Subbarayan said that they should not fritter away their energy in holding conferences, but store it to train a group of young men who would tour the country like the Buddhist monks to preach the message of Self-Respect.

M. K. Reddy, the Chairman of the Reception Committee in his welcome address chastised the priestly hierarchy "for onshrouding the people in superstition and maintaining them in a state of suicidal ignorance."[47]

W. P. A. Soundara Pandian, in his presidential address criticised Brahmins for foisting on the Tamils the divisive caste system. He abominated the Sanskrit Puranas, Itihasas, Vedas and Agamas and eulogized the Tamil ancient classics like the Tirukkural and the Silappatikaram.[48]

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46 T. A V. Nathan, *Justice Year Book*, 1929, Section IV, p. 110.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 114.

48 *Ibid.*, pp. 119-120.

The speakers of the Conference were stressing the importance of rationalizing social and religious institutions in order to make them egalitarian. The resolutions passed at the Conference showed the future course of the movement for the achievement of its aim. But earlier it was decided not to indulge in politics.[49] They decided to educate the masses not only through press and platform but also by taking positive steps. They aimed at remedying the sectarian values practised in the society. The Self Respecters made an appeal to the government not to recognise caste differences either in the administration or in the law of the country. They urged the popular representatives elected by the people to legislate against the institution of caste.

The Self-Respecters on their part dropped the caste appellations appended to their names, avoided all caste symbols and encouraged inter-caste marriages. E. V. R. who was called E. V. Ramasami Naicker and W. P. A. Soundara Pandian who was called Soundara Pandia Nadar dropped their caste titles along with a host of others. They vowed not to use any markl symbol or mode of dress indicative of caste[50] It was on the basis of this resolution it was decided to give up all suffixes and terminations connotative of caste, sect or community.

The Self-Respecters laid high hopes on women for social reform and so they championed their cause. They believed that if the social restrictions to which women had been subjected were removed they could occupy their legitimate place in society and play an active role in the reform activities. In the Conference, speeches were made advocating widow remarriage and denouncing child marriage, dowry system and the Devadasi system. Women's

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49 *Justice*, 20 January, 1929; *Kudi Arasu*, 13 January, 1929.

50 Though the actual number of persons who had dropped their caste marks at that time could not be ascertained later in 1932 there were 1,50,000 people in the province who were estimated to have dropped their caste names and caste marks —*Kudi Arasu*, 26 June 1932.

right to inherit property to divorce, to practise the modern methods of birth control and inter-caste marriage were upheld by them.

They turned their attention next towards the concept of Brahmin superiority. They analysed the causes which gave them the superior position in society. They thought that the Hindu religion gave the Brahmins a sacerdotal postion in society and religious institutions like the temples and mutts were the source of their income. So they thought that if the Brahmins were deprived of their income their superior status in society would automatically collapse As they considered the religious institutions and the various Hindu religious rites conducted by Brahmins as their permanent source of unearned income, they passed a resolution calling on the non-Brahmins to refrain from spending any money on worship in temples and exorted them not to build new temples and to reject the services of Brahmin priest in performing domestic ceremonies. It was also advocated that the income of the existing temples should not be spent on celebrating festivals but should be utilized for promoting technological studies, vocational education, industrial research and educating the masses in public health and general hygiene.[51]

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51 Sami Chidambaranar, *Op. Cit* , p. 110.
*Resolutions :*
(a) This conference is of opinion that not a single pie or a single pie worth of material should be used in the cause of worship in the name of God, and that no priest or intermediary between the worshipper and the worshipped should be employed.
(b) This conference is of opinion that no temple ought to be erected hereafter and that the income of and the properties of the existing temples and mutts should be utilized for the promotion of technological studies, vocational education and industrial research.
(c) This conference is of opinion that the celebration of festivals in temples ought to be immediately put a stop to and in their stead, should be organized exhibitions for dissemination of knowledge among the people of such subjects as sanitation, public health etc. - T. A. V. Nathan *Op. Cit* , p. 131.

## Criticisms

Some of the Justice leaders attending the Conference bitterly criticised the resolution calling for sanctions against Hindu temples. T. Varadarajulu Naidu proposed an amendment to part (a) of the resolution which pleaded for allowing devotees to make in offerings temples. The amendment was supported by K. V. Menon, who said that although he agreed with the suggestion that the services of the intermediary between the worshipper and the God had to be dispensed with, he could neither support nor subscribe to the aims of the resolution unless it was amended suitably. Therefore he moved an amendment to part (b) of the resolution which read as :

> Only such amount as remained surplus after meeting the legitimate minimum requirements of the temples concerned, should be utilized for the promotion of technological studies, vocational and industrial research.

Further he issued a warning that unless a mandate was obtained from the people, the passing of such radical resolutions at the conference would be useless. As the bulk of the delegates were behind E. V. R., the main resolution was passed without any amendment with overwhelming majority.

The speeches and resolutions at this conference reflected a different phase of the Movement that had been articulated during the previous years — its strong egalitarian bias and above all its desire to attract young people and women, towards what it considered to be the Dravidian civilization.[52]

The Movement had its constitution finalized on the 18th of February 1929 at Chingleput.[53] The organisation of the Self-Respect Movement was given a final shape with a General Council of enthusiastic members. Elections were held for the

52 Eugene F. Irschick, *Op. Cit.*, p. 341.
53 Appendix V.

office-bearers of the Movement. The mode of election was not clearly known. Sathankulam A. Raghavan, a member of the Self-Respect Movement in an interview pointed out that the names suggested by E. V. R. were generally accepted. It was almost unanimous W. P. A. Soundara Pandian, who presided over the First Provincial Conference was to continue as the President for the succeeding year also. E. V. R. and A. T. Panneer Selvam became the Vice-Presidents. S. Ramanathan and S. Shanmugam were the Secretary and Treasurer respectively. R. K. Shanmugam (Chettiar), M. K. Sami, K. A. P. Viswanatham, Pichappa, Sinniah, Arya, Kanagasapabathy and Rathinasapabathy were chosen as Committee Members. There was no women representative.

The Self-Respect Conference represented the growing militance of persons who though trained by Gandhian non-co-operation techniques, had assimilated the racial theories pros pounded by such men as Caldwell, Nelson, Grant Duff and Sundaram Pillai. The Self-Respect Movement was a distinctly new development in South India, one that gave the concept of Dravidianism a new and broader attraction. This Conference showed that the Self-Respect Movement unlike the Justice Party was not hampered by the restrictions of wealth and orthodox religion and it was ready to use inflammatory ways and means to achieve its ends.

The initial reaction to the Conference and the resolutions came from the non-Brahmin leaders in the Tamilnad Congress[54] They were considered by the leaders of the Congress as a challenge. They viewed them from a political angle as the elections were scheduled for 1930. The view of the Congress was expressed by P S. Thandapani in the Pudukkottai Self-Respect Workers' Conference.[55] M. Bakthavatsalam who was one of the younger members of the Tamilnad Congress charged

54 Mayilaikizhar, *Pena Chithiram* (Pena Portrait), (Madras, 1939), p. 42.
55 *Kumaran*, 30 May, 1928.

the Justice party with encouraging anti-religious activities in the country by identifying themselves with the ideologies of the Self-Respect Movement. The resolution against temple worship passed in the Conference was criticised by him as absurd and rediculous.[56] "Desabandhu", a vernacular paper called upon the Government to take immediate action to curb the irreligious activities of the Movement.[57] "Tamilnadu", another vernacular paper viewed that the resolutions passed at the Conference were the indication of Self-Respecter's immaturity and lack of understanding of the cultural traditions of the people.[58]

Some non-Brahmin leaders belonging to the Vellala community who were largely confined to the North Arcot and Chingleput Districts and to the Pillai Community of Tirunelveli and Tanjore Districts also attacked them. They feared that their cultural and religious way of life would be blotted out of existence if the Self-Respect Movement succeeded[59] They thought that the resolutions of the Self-Respect Movement were the signs of slipping away from the traditional way of religious life. They were so enthusiastic to counter the activities of the Self-Respect Movement, that they organized religious conferences in different districts to explain to the masses the basic concepts of Saivism. The position of Vaishnavites not known.

There were many Vellalas who deplored the attack on religion One Vellala, Ti. Mu. Arumukam, published a pamphlet

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56 *Revolt*, 20 March, 1929.

57 Madras Native Newspaper Report (MNNR), 1929.

58 *Tamil Nadu*, 15 March, 1929.

56 Tirunelveli a prominent Vellala, Tiruvarangam Pillai put banners in Tirunelveli town 'Kadavulai Ninthikkum Kayavar Koottathirku Sellatheerkal' (Don't attend the meeting of foolishmen who criticise God); A. Raghavan, Personal interview, Palayamkkotai, 22 November, 1975 with the author.

in 1929 entitled "Suyamariyataikku or Suttukkol" (A criticism against Self-Respect) in deference of traditional religion. Another Vellala, E N. Thanikachalam Mudaliar, a Member of the Saiva Siddhanta Samajam, wrote a letter to the Hindu arguing that in the face of the threat poised by Self-Respect activity, Saiva Siddhanta still had a relevence to modern life.[60]

The Tirunelveli Saiva Siddhanta Conference was one among those conferences which needs a special mention. This conference was held on March 29, 1929. In this conference the Saivites took the sting out of the Self-Respecters criticism by accepting in principle the rights of the untouchables to enter any Saiva temple provided they adhered to the concepts of Saivism and practised vegetarianism in their daily life. At the same conference it was resolved to admit Christian converts also to Saivism under a specified declaration and costless ceremony.[61]

From the foregoing remarks, it is clear that as we have noticed so far, the Self-Respecters were opposed by the Congress leaders and on the basis of politics by the Saivites on the basis of culture. The non-Brahmin Saivites also convened a series of conferences to uphold Varnasramadharma.[62]

Under the Presidentship of Krishnasami Pavalar a Vedantist of Chintadripet, Madras the 'Astiga Sangh' was started. "Desabandhu", a vernacular weekly supported these measures.[63] Similar Sabhas and Sanghs were started in various parts of Tamilnadu.[64] But the activities of these associations could not combat the speedy development of the Self-Respect Movement. At Tiruppathirippuliyur, Siva Shanmuga Meignana Sivacharya

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60 *Hindu*, 9 March 1929; See also *Ibid.*, April, 30 1929.

61 Tirunelveli Saiva Siddhanta Conference Malar, (Tirunelveli, 1929), p. 98; *Revolt*, 10 April, 1929.

62 *Ibid*. 17 March 1929.

63 Mayilaikizhar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 40.

64 *Ibid*, p. 41.

Swamigal and Maraimalai Adigal established an organisation, to counter the Self-Respect Movement and to spread Saivism. Sachithanantham Pillai convened 'Saiva Periyar Mahanadu' (Saiva Sages Conference) at Tirunelveli on 30 and 31 March 1929. At the Thiruppathirippuliyur 'Saivar Mahanadu' (Saivites conference) in which Tiru. Vi. Ka. participated it was resolved not to support or encourage those who attack Saiva sages and their works.[65] In the month of April, 1929 alone 3 or 4 Varnashrama Conferences and Saiva Sanga meetings it had taken place.[66] Tiru. Vi. Ka. strongly opposed the Self-Respect Movement. He remarked that by the propaganda of the Self-Respecters only communal hatred would develop and it would spoil the harmony of the country.[67] While the other oppositions to Self-Respect Movement were not so vigorous, the opposition of Krishnasami Pavalar was very pungent.[68] To put down the Movement the following persons i. e. Krishnasami Pavalar, Kuzhanthai, Shafi Muhammad, Jayavelu and Tiru. Vi. Ka. met to discuss the plans, but nothing materialised.[69]

The Self-Respect Movement was criticised as an irresponsible one at an Astiga Sanga Conference held in April 1929. While they were critical of the Movement, they were also analysing the reasons for the growth of such a Movement. They made an appeal to their community members to probe into the causes of spread of atheism. The organisers of the Conference succeeded in passing resolutions reaffirming their faith in the validity of Varnashramadharma. They appealed to government also to put an end to the atheistic activities of the Self-Respecters in the Province.[70] They showed their

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65 *Kumaran*, 6 June 1929.

66 *Kudi Arasu*, 7 April, 1929.

67 Tiru. Vi. Ka., *Op Cit.*, p. 177 and 259.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 177.

69 *Tamil Nadu*, 16 March, 1929.

70 *Kudi Arasu*, 25 August, 1929.

anxiety to safeguard their personal safety and their unwillingness to see the emergence of an egalitarian Hindu society where differences based purely on birth would be non-existent. The third attack came from the Brahmins.

The resolutions passed in the Saiva Conferences were generally welcomed by the Self-Respecters for they thought that it would create an awakening in the society and fulfil in the long run, the avowed object of Self-Respecters. Welcoming the Tirunelveli Saivite Conference 'Kumaran' wrote two editorials.[71] The Self-Respecters continued to proceed on the same lines inspite of the opposition from various directions.

Inspite of the strong opposition of the non-Brahmin Saivites and orthodox Brahmins, the Self-Respecters did not alter their stand against religion. It made them to probe further into religion and expose religious absurdities. The motive of the Vellalas opposing of the Self-Respect Movement was suspected. They gave currency to the idea that the orthodox Brahmins were behind the Vellalas. The first to give out such a view was K. M. Balasubramaniam who was also a Vellala.[72] His idea seems to have been very popular for P. Chidambaram Pillai in his serial articles in the 'Revolt' entitled, 'Saivism: An exposure' and 'Saivite Mentality and Self-Respect' suggested to the Brahmins and the Vellalas that they should pool their resources openly to fight the Movement instead of working together clandestinely.[73] He called the Vellalas, chiefly the educated youth, to join the ranks of the Movement in order to remove the barriers of caste and religion and disparities based on sex—the three great obstacles to the progress of non-Brahmins. The Vellalas who were responsible

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71 *Revolt* from 1 May to 1 September, 1929.

72 'Temple Entry in the Tamil Country', *Revolt*, 30 June 1929.

73 *Revolt*, 8 September 1929.

for the establishment of the Self-Respect Movement also became the target of its attack.[74]

Not only the Tamilnadu leaders and Saivites were critical but also All-India leaders like Sardar Vallabhai Patel were critical of the Movement. During his tour in 1929, Sardar questioned whether the widow remarriage would solve food problem and wanted the government to take action against them. E. V. R. condemned such an attitude of a responsible leader.[75]

## Workers' Conference

The convening of the First Self-Respect Workers' Conference was a significent event. It was convened to organise the workers and to bring them under the direct control of the Movement. In this Conference under the Presidenship of S. Gurusami (Popularly known as 'Kuttucci Gurusami'), E. V. R., Nagammiar, A. T. Panneerselvam, W. P. A. Soundara Pandian, S. Ramanathan, S. Muniappan, S. Ramachandran, Ponnambalanar, Mayavaram C. Natarajan and a host of others took part.[76] It was resolved in the Conference to condemn those who believed in Varna difference, to plead for prohibition, to give physical exercise to workers, to promote widow remarriage and to help those who had participated in the temple entry agitation and were facing actions by the government.[77]

## Non-Brahmins Youth Conference

The Non-Brahmins Youth Conference held under the auspices of the Madurai-Ramanathapuram Districts fully accepted the resolutions passed at the Chingleput Conference. At the end

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74 *Revolt*, 1 September, 1929.

75 *Kudi Arasu*, 29 September, 1929.

76 Kuruvikkarambai Velu, *Kuttucci Gurusami*, (Madras, 1975). p 46.

77 *Kudi Arasu*, June, 1929.

of the Conference they raised the slogans 'Long Live E. V. R' and 'Long Live Self-Respect'.[78] As E V. R. was on propaganda. tour, after the Chingleput Conference he did not take part in the All-India Travancore Social Reform Conference held in the same year and he was represented by R. K. Shanmugam. The membership campaign was started earlier. For the above work an announcement appeared in Kudi Arasu.[79] A school to train up young boys in Self-Respect ideologies was also advertised. But it did not materialise.[80]

## A row over Orthodox Religion

The Self-Respecters' attitude towards the orthodox religion was viewed from any altogether different angle by some of the Justice Party leaders and the enlightened supporters of E. V. R. They did not read the resolutions literally as others had done previously, but considered only the spirit in which they were adopted. Ramasamy Mudaliar, a young member of the Justice Party who himself had expressed his disagreement at the Conference over the controversial resolutions on temple worship in an address at the Gokhale hall said:

> the leaders of the Self-Respect Movement have done their task: they have increased the literature over the

78 *Ibid.*, 8 September, 1929.

79 சுய மரியாதை மாகாணச் சங்கம்
காரியதரிசி,
சு. ம. மாகாணச் சங்கம்,
திராவிடன் பதிப்பகம்,
146, மவுண்ட் ரோடு, சென்னை.
ஐயா,
என்னைத் தங்கள் சங்கத்தில் அங்கத்தினராய்ச் சேர்த்துக் கொள்ளக் கேட்டுக் கொள்ளுகின்றேன். இத்துடன் ஓர் ஆண்டுக்கட்டணம் 0-2-0 அனுப்பியிருக்கின்றேன்.
பெயர் ... ... ... ...
விலாசம் ... ... ... ...
(இதில் கையொப்பமிட்டு வெட்டி அனுப்பவும்)
*Kudi Arasu*, 16 June, 1929.

80 *Kudi Arasu*, 24 Septemper, 1929.

question of temple worship and temple entry; they have driven you to examine the whole position; they have made you realise that your religious system wants an examination and while you were sleeping the need had arisen - if need be—even to combat the Self-Respect propaganda, that you should come forward with your facts of the religious and social systems in the country. That I believe had been the result of their activities.[81]

S. Gurusami contended that, although, the resolution on temple worship was strongly worded, its primary aim was to make the religious leaders realize that a weed like growth of rites, rituals, ceremonials and intermediaries had developed around the Hindu religion and that the clearing work had to be undertaken to restore it to its formal glory.[82] Though the heads of religious institutions were shocked at the growth of the Self-Respect Movement none took action to stem its activity. The Self-Respect Conference had drawn the attention of the legislators. Hundreds of questions were raised on the floor of the legislature about the Conference.[83] But the posture of the Self-Respecters against the Hindu religion could not be altered by these oppositions. But the original plan of registering the Movement was not so far carried out.[84]

## Support to Dr. P. Subbarayan

The Self-Respecters continued to support the Independent Ministry headed by Dr. P. Subbarayan. The influence of the Self-Respecters was witnessed in the acts of the Ministry. In 1929 the Subbarayan Ministry abolished the system of separate hostels for the Brahmins, non-Brahmins and the Christian girls studying in Madras city and introduced common hostel system

81 *Revolt*, May 1929, First quoted by E. Sa. Viswanathan.
82 *Revolt*, 10 April, 1929.
83 *Kudi Arasu*, 4 August 1929.
84 *Ibid.*, 16 June, 1929.

where caste or religion was no criterian. Likewise hostels for widows were thrown open to all communities by March 1929.[85]

Even in 1930 the ministrialists introduced certain reform bills. A bill in May 1930 for the removal of untouchability practised in temples maintained from public funds was introduced.[86] S. Muthulakshmi Reddi's Anti-nauch Bill which sought to abolish the custom of dedicating young women to Hindu temples was introduced. This bill was also supported by the ministerialists. Subbarayan's other social schemes were the establishment of hostels and training centres for widows in various rural areas, offering free books, education and mid-day meals for all scheduled caste children and founding free boarding schools for them in important towns. The Self-Respecters also built up a formidable public support in favour of Subbarayan Ministry for furthering social legislation.

## Malaya Tour

The leader of the Self-Respect Movement E. V. R. in December 1929, on the invitation of Malayan Tamils visited the then Federal Malayan States.[87] Approximately for two weeks he toured the estate villages, addressed public meetings and propagated ideas of social reform among the South Indian Community. Before he reached there he was publicised and misinterpreted in different ways. It was said that he was coming there for preaching against Jesus and Prophet Muhammad. One English weekly said that by his visit public morality would be spoiled God and religion would be in danger, was the cry. The Editor of 'Tamil Nesan' toured and made anti-propaganda work against his visit. The other charges were that he was a

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85 *Dravidan*, 8 March, 1929; *Kudi Arasu*, 31 March, 1929; Government of Madras, Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council, 1929 (Various dated).

86 *Mail* and *Hindu*, 13 and 14 May, 1930.

87 *Kumaran*, 19 December, 1929.

Bolshevist and anti-British.[88] His visit though brief created a considerable ferment among them and this led to the launching of Tamil Reform Association with its headquarters in Singapore and an important branch at Kuala-Lumpur. This Association espoused with greater ardour the ideals of E. V. R.'s Self-Respect Movement and vigorously agitated for the removal of caste disabilities of the untouchables and the rejection of Brahmanical rituals at marriages and funerals. This tour facilitated the alien nationals such as the Chinese and Japanese to get themselves familiar with the ideals of Self-Respect Movement by attending his meetings.

**Sankaracharya and E. V. R.**

Though the religious leaders were not serious about the activities of the Self-Respect Movement in the beginning, in 1930 Sankaracharya of Sringeri Mutt thought that some dialogue should be held with E. V. R. in order to tone down his criticisms and to understand the real meaning and purpose of the Movement. Accordingly when he was camping at Pushpavanam in North Arcot District a personal letter was written to E. V. R. inviting him to visit Sringeri for a discussion concerning the different aspects of Hindu religion.[89] In his letter Sankaracharya also indicated that he would be able to support the ideologies of the Self-Respect Movement provided they conformed to the basic tenets of Hindu religion.[90] E. V. R. published this letter in Kudi Arasu on 2 March, 1930, expressing his doubts as to the usefulness of such a meeting. His colleagues also told him that nothing fruitful would emerge out of such a meeting. As expected the meeting never took place.[91]

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88 *Kudi Arasu*, 9 February, 1930.

89 *Ibid.*, 2 March, 1930.

90 *Kumaran*, 6 March, 1930.

91 Sami Chidambaranar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 116.

## Salt Satyagraha

When the Salt Satyagraha was organized by Rajaji in Tamilnadu in 1930, E. V. R. openly declared that he was wholly against Salt Satyagraha. He questioned the economic viability of the salt making campaign and remarked that it was the Congress Party's grand political stunt, meant to encourage people in the subvertion of law and order in the country.[92] E. V. R.'s main target of attack was Gandhi and his political philosophy.

## Erode Conference

The Second Provincial Self-Respect Conference was held in May 1930 at Erode.[93] M. R. Jayakar was the President of the Conference.[94] As in the first Conference in this Conference also there were separate wings for the Youth, Women, Prohibition, Music etc. R. K. Shanmugam was the Chairman of the Reception Committee. P. Chidambaram presided over the Youth Conference and the choice for the Chairmanship of the Women Conference fell on Muthulakshmi Reddy. S. Ramachandran and Ponniah were Presidents of Prohibition and Music Conferences.[95]

For the year 1930-31, M. R. Jayakar who was the President of the Conference became the President of the Movement itself. S. Ramanathan became the Secretary. S. Ramachandran, J. S. Kannappar, P. Chidambaram, C. S. Rathinasapabathy, Gurusami, Kunjitham Gurusami, R. K. Shanmugam, E V. R., W. P. A. Soundarapandian and K. A. P. Viswanatham were the executive committee members.[96]

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92 *Kudi Arasu*, 13, 20, 27 April, 1930.
93 *Kumaran*, 3 April, 1930.
94 K. M. Balasubramaniam, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 21–23.
95 Sami Chidambaranar, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 136 - 137.
96 *Kumaran*, 22 May, 1930.

Resolutions condemning of Varnasramadharma and untouchability, advocating right of entry into public places for all communities irrespective of caste, abolition of caste titles, bills to abolish disparities based on birth, abolition of the intermediaries between the worshipper and worshipped, withdrawal of taxless lands from the holders, utilization of temple funds for education and health, abolition of temple festivals and conduct of exhibition, enhancement of the minimum age of consent for males and females and legalisation of inter-caste marriages by amending Hindu Marriage Act were passed in the Conference.[97]

At this Second Madras Provincial Self-Respect Conference in sharp contrast to his attitude of the previous year, E. V. R. avoided all controversies and emphasized only the social reform programmes of the Movement. His speech created the impression that he was interested in clearing all misunderstandings that had risen over his speech in the Chingleput Conference rather than defending the atheistic aspect of the Self-Respect ideology. He had also pointed out that he would not have any truck with any movement which preached atheism openly and denied religion.[98]

R. K. Shanmugam in his address of welcome said that although some of the resolutions passed at the previous conference had given the impression that the Movement was against all religious institutions, its cardinal aim was to free the common man from the greedy priestly class and to educate him on the futility of his worship with material offerings. He further said that the protagonists of the Movement criticised religion not because of their faith in atheism but because the orthodox Hindus continued the sanction of religion for the perpetuation of all unjust laws and objectionable customs.

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97 *Ibid.*, 11, 12 May, 1930.

98 *Hindu*, 11 May 1930, *Mail*, 12 May 1930.

He emphasised that "it has never been and never will be the aim of our Movement to preach the doctrine of atheism".[99]

Commenting on the welcome address of R. K. Shanmugam, "Mail" said that the cardinal principle of the Self-Respect Movement might be 'unassailable' but the general attitude of the champions of the Movement caused anxiety, if not horror in the minds of the people.[100]

In this conference certain young followers denounced the government's repressive measures to supress the Civil Disobedience Movement and they attempted to bring a resolution condemning such measures of the Government.[101] But E. V. R. firmly stood against this move and remarked that whatever might be the reasons, Self-Respecters should not support Civil Disobedience and it should function as an independent Social Reform Movement. The resolutions of this conference had an impact on the Congress. While the Self-Respecters passed a resoultion urging the government that no government servant should be paid a salary more than 1000 rupees per month, Congress passed resolutions that the amount should not exceed Rs. 500 per month.[102]

## A Split

After this conference a section of the Self-Respecters left the Movement and joined Congress. Their attraction towards Salt Satyagraha and personal hatred towards E. V. R. were the reasons for their defection. They argued that as the declared policy of the Movement was non-political, the leader should also stick to this policy and refrain from making controversial statements against Congress agitation. Therefore the youths left the Movement disowning his view. This splinter

99 *Mail*, 10 May 1930.
100 *Ibid.*
101 *Kumaran*, 3 April, 1930.
102 *Ibid.*, 22 May, 1930.

group formed the National Self-Respect Party and merged with the Congress after sometime. But E. V. R. was nonchalant and continued to function as before.[103]

## Return from the Tour and After

After his return from the tour E. V. R. had drawn his attention to the internal policies of the Justice Party and Civil Disobedience Campaign of the Congress. He continued to hold charge of 'Dravidan', the Justice Party's Tamil weekly. This weekly mirrored not the official views but the views of E. V. R. only. In the Justice hierarchy B. Munuswamy Naidu became the leader after the death of Panagal Raja. The present leader was for the admission of Brahmins into the Justice fold which was against the principle of E. V. R. But this attitude was welcomed by the Congress Brahmin leaders like Satyamurti and Srinivasa Iyengar.[104]

The Simon Commission Report was published in June 1930. Its recommendations caused considerable disappointment in political circles. The leaders of the Indian National Congress unanimously rejected the main recommendations and decided to boycott the Round Table Conference. The Self-Respecters took a realistic view of the recommendation of the Statutory Commission and the Congress stand on them. They commended the Commission's report 'as a right step' towards furthering Constitutional progress in the country and E. V. R. listed the benefits derived by the minorities such as the Muslims and the Schedule Castes.[105]

## Virudhunagar Conference

Virudhunagar in Ramnad District was the venue of the third and final Provincial Self-Respect Conference. For the con-

103 Sami Chidambaranar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 136.
104 *Mail*, 17 June, 1930.
105 *Kudi Arasu*, 20 June, 1930.

vening of the conference at Virudhunagar W. P. A. Soundarapandian was responsible for it was he who invited E. V. R. to hold it at Virudhunagar.[106] It was originally planned to make Hari Singh, the President of the Conference. But later the honour was bestowed on R. K. Shanmugam.[107] The Conference was inaugurated on 8 August 1931 under the Presidentship of R. K. Shanmugam. V. V. Ramasami a leading merchant of Virudhunagar was the Reception Committee Chairman.[108] More than 8000 people took part to this conference including delegates from foreign countries like Burma, Ceylon and Federal Malayan States.[109]

Before the inauguration of the Conference, pamphlets were issued criticising the Conference. Mrs. Neelavathi Ramasubramanian condemned the attitude of those who had distributed the pamphlets. This Conference marked a further development in the ideology of the Self-Respecters as they passed a resolution for the abolition of all religions. All associations that supported Varnashrama should be discarded. They declared that for the removal of untouchability Brahmanism must be destroyed and they preached inter-caste marriages. Hindi policy was condemned. E. V. R. who was responsible for the propagation of Khaddar in this Presidency declared from now on that it was uneconomical. Marriage of widows and allowing divorce were also the theme of other resolutions. The resolution that requested the government to put a ban on the practice of discrimination of Harijans in the Railways, Municipal Hotels and Public Buildings was an important one. Another resolution requested the government to dispense with religious holidays.[110]

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106 *Kumaran*, 26 February, 1931.

107 *Ibid.*

108 *Kudi Arasu*, 16 August, 1931.

109 *Ibid.*

110 *Ibid.*

M Singaravelu did nott ake part in this Conference due to ill health. But he disapproved of the way in which of the Conference was conducted. He was socialistic in outlook and therefore the pompous show in the Conference was not liked by him. He felt that at that rate the Movement would become a tool in the hands of the capitalists. He expressed his fear through the newspaper.[111]

One of the significant features of the Conference was the introduction of inter-dining. Members from all communities including Brahmins sat together and ate. It was a very strange and remarkable thing at that time. Even among the non-Brahmin communities, the higher caste Hindus never liked to dine with the so called lower castes.

As in the earlier conferences in this Conference also the President of the Conference was made the President for the succeeding year. Thiru R. K. Shanmugam became the President, and W. P. A. Soundarapandian and E. V. R. became Vice-Presidents. S Ramanathan continued as the Secretary. V. S. Shanmugam was elected as the Treasurer. 14 others were made the Executive committee members. A resolution to this effect was proposed by E V. R. and seconded by R. Chidambaram. This in itself would indicate that E. V. R. was the real leader and the names proposed by him were accepted. This election of office-bearers was only for name sake.[112]

In continuation of this Conference the Madras State Second Self-Respect Workers' Conference was held on 30 August 1931 at Tiruvarur. K. V. Alagirisami presided over this Conference and the resolutions of the Third Provincial Conference were accepted.[113] Between 1931-32 one conference each at Tuticorin,

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111 *Ibid.*, 30 August, 1931.

112 *Ibid.*, 16 August, 1931.

113 *Ibid.*, 6 September, 1931; *Kumaran*, 3 September, 1931.

Karaikudi, Madras and Nannilam, two conferences at Lalgudi and a State conference were held. During this period alone 10 conferences were held throughout the year 1931.[114]

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114 *Ibid.*, 24 April, 1932.

# 4

# Towards Communism and After

## Continental Tour

The swift turn of events in the international scene had a tremendous impact on the thinking and action of the Self-Respect leaders. Among the world events of that day the daring experiment of the Soviets in attacking the age old problem of economic disparity in the society attracted the attention of leaders of the Self-Respect Movement To them it was an epoch-making event in the history of mankind and deserved a closer study. E V R. decided on a tour of Russia and other countries of the continent. In December 13, 1931 he set out from Madras on an itinerary which apart from Russia included Germany, England, Spain, France and many other countries of the Middle East. He was accompanied by S. Ramanathan, Secretary of the Movement and Erode Ramu.

They took one year to complete what might be regarded as a study tour of the Western World. This tour helped them to acquaint themselves with different socio-political systems prevailing in those countries and to establish contacts with like-minded organizations. They enrolled themselves as members of the Rationalist Press Association of London. They met Sakalatwala in London and understood from him the labour problems. They made arrangement with the authorities of the Rationalist Press Association to send their Publications periodically to Madras to supplement their propaganda.[1]

During this stay at Berlin they made contacts with Socialist and Communist organizations. They even went to the Nudist Societies and E. V. R. and Ramanathan never felt shy to be nude among that group. The aim of their visit was to find out how far the practice of nudism would suit Self-Respect ideologies. After his return of the tour E. V. R. never felt shy to reveal his visit to the Nudist societies.

Then they proceeded to U. S. S. R. where they stayed for three months. They were received by the President of U. S. S. R. Mikhail Ivanorich Kalinin, who was the son of an ordinary farmer. E. V. R. and his colleagues were struck by the simplicity, kindness and personal interest of Kalinin. E. V. R. understood that his visit to Soviet Union was not a mistake. It seemed to him that he had found in Russia what he was searching for throughout his life namely equality. He understood that there was neither rich nor poor people in Russia and people got their positions by dint of their own labour. They visited cities after cities, factories, collective farms, schools and hospitals scientific institutions and art centres. They talked with politicians, philosophers, teachers and writers, artists and scientists. At the May Day meeting in which he was asked

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1 Sami Chidambaranar, *Tamilar Talaivar*, pp. 147–148; Periyar's 85 Birthday Commemoration Souvenir, pp. 139-40.

to address E. V. R spoke about the oppressed classes of India, the poverty and the lack of even the bare necessities of life for the people. E. V. R. went to the extent of applying for Soviet citizenship but he did not succeed.[2] They registered themselves in Moscow as members of the Anti-Religious Propaganda Association. The egalitarian social system obtaining in the Bolshevic Russia appealed to the imagination of E. V. R. and his companion. The visit to the Soviet Union had a deeper impact on E. V. R. than on his colleague and Secretary of the Movement, S. Ramanathan.[3] On their way home from Russia they halted in Ceylon and E. V. R. delivered a number of lectures there.[4]

Baptised in the red waters of Bolshevism and blessed by it with bell, book and candle these zealots of the new creed dreamt new dreams and meditated on daring plans. Even while on tour E. V. R. dicussed with S. Ramanathan the possibility of adopting a new programme for the Movement in the light of the experience they had gained in the U. S. S. R. They returned to India in high spirits with the hot gospel of communism to be preached and spread at home. E. V. R.'s programme heavily loaded with Soviet Communism but Ramanathan rejected the idea of change, and held that political Communism as developed in Russia was unsuitable for the Indian Social System.[5]

The impact could be easily noted by E. V. R.'s statement after his return from European tour. He advised the workers of the Movement to use the word 'Thozhar' (Tamil equivalent of the word "Comrade") while addressing each other. Even women had to be called in the same way to follow the

2 Dr. L. V. Shapashnikova, *Years and days in Madras*, (Madras, 1971), p. 49.

3 An admirer, *Periyar E. V. R., A Pen Portrait*, pp. 39-40.

4 *Kudi Arasu*, November 20, 1932.

5 S. Ramanathan. 'Self-Respect Movement', *Kuttuci Gurusami Ninaivu Malar*, pp. 40-41.

principle of equality.[6] His zeal could be easily noticed in a statement through which he ordered his followers to do away with the following difference viz high and low, boss and worker, guru and sishya (Teacher and disciple), government officer and peon, and Mahatma and ordinary Atma. He called upon the people to unite themselves with all people who were suffering.[7]

E. V. R. alone returned from the tour without S. Ramanathan. Ramanathan's absence was reported that he would return after visiting Geneva.[8] But a letter of S. Ramanathan to J. S. Kannappar had created a controversy.[9] E. V. R. was criticised in that letter for having left S. Ramanathan in Marsailles without a single pie. While E. V R. refuted this, the copy of the original letter was published and made the charge proved [10] This was one of the reasons that had created dissension in the Movement. Not only the ideological differences of S. Ramanathan with E. V. R. but also the indifferent attitude of the President towards the Secretary which drove a wedge in the Movement.

## Erode Programme

On his return to Madras on 11th November, 1932 E. V. R. decided to change the character of the Movement as otherwise the political influence of the non-Brahmins in the provincial politics would wane. The Self-Respect and social reform spirit, the indigenous medicines for the disease of India suddenly yielded place to Socialism and Communism, the alien medicines imported

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6 *Kudi Arasu*, 13 November, 1932

7 *Ibid* 20 November, 1932; As a consequent of his Russian visit the dais at the Self-Respect Conference of Tanjore District at Nagappattinam was named as 'Samadharma Panthal' (Dais) - *Kudi Arasu*, 9 April 1933.

8 *Kudi Arasu*, 13 November 1932.

9 *Gandhi*, 18 November, 1932.

10 *Ibid.*, 30 November. 1932.

from the U. S. S. R. In this connection the differences that arose between E. V. R. and S. Ramanathan could be studied.

In colloboration with Singaravelu, E. V. R. chalked out a new programme and to discuss this a meeting of the General Body was convened at Erode on 28–29 December 1932.[11] This meeting was attended by the Self-Respect followers from various districts. The new programme envisaged the formation of two wings within the Self-Respecters : the Self-Respect League and Self-Respect Samadharma Party of South India. (Self-Respect Socialist Party).[12] It was clear from the programme that while the former would confine its activities solely to social reform and function as a social reform wing, the latter would put up candidates for the elections of the Provincial Councils and other local bodies. Apart from this there was very little difference in their objectives. In the next issue of Kudi Arasu, the proposed formation was announced [13] If its Tamil name already identifies the new movement with Socialism its programme was an obsequious copy of Soviet Communism [14] The aims of the two wings of the Movement were comprehensively termed in the Erode Programme [15]

When this Erode Programme was taken up for discussion in the meeting a large number of members favoured direct participation in the election instead of supporting other political parties which they had been doing previously. They argued that in the face of increasing popularity of the Congress among the masses, especially after the Non-co-operation Campaign and the Salt Satyagraha, the situation warranted such a decision. They pointed out that although the Justice Party had been

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11 *Kudi Arasu,* 1 January, 1933; Sami Chidambaranar, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 147–148.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 147–148.

13 *Kudi Arasu,* 1 January, 1933.

14 *Kings Rally,* January, 1933.

15 Appendix VI.

striving to safeguard the political interest of non-Brahmins, its hold on masses had been loosening in recent years largely for want of close contact. Internal dissensions in that Party too has its ill effects. So they contended that in view of the up-surge of nationalism unless the Justice Party made some radical changes in its programme and strengthened its ranks it would not be in a position to challenge the Congress supremacy in the province. As this could not be expected at this stage, the advocates of the new programme suggested that the proposed political wing of the Movement should be formed forthwith and strengthened in all aspects.

When it was remarked that only a mass movement with a radical programme like the Self-Respect Movement, could take up the challenge posed by the growing strength of the 'Brahmin dominated' Tamilnad Congress.[16] Ramanathan and some others objected to the direct involvement in politics. Their fear was that for the achievement of political goal, they might have to abandon their ideal of social reform. They cited the Justice Party as a model to substantiate their stand. Their feeling was that in the society which was wedded to the extreme form of religious superstition and age-old beliefs regarding property rights, the introduction of a programme on the model of Soviet Communism would not be possible. They also warned that unless proper care was taken in adopting such a policy it would pave the way for dictatorship.[17]

However, E. V. R. who was all along opposed to the direct entry into politics was now not in a mood to oblige the group led by Ramanathan. He also contended that since the Movement was a mass organization its programme whether social, political or economic, should be oriented towards the welfare of the majority people than the privileged few. He made an appeal to his followers to adopt the programme in

16 *Kudi Arasu*, 8 January, 1933.
17 *Ibid.*

the interest of the country. The resolution was opposed by Ramanathan, Sami Chidambaranar and others. But the resolution was accepted with a majority.[18]

To popularise the Erode programme, conferences were held in every district. In these conferences the Erode Programme was ratified and the same was recommended to the State Conference through resolutions. In such conferences which were convened to give wider publicity to the new programme E. V. R. tried to convince Ramanathan and others. E. V. R. said that to establish a proletarian government, the workers should rally round the Samadharma Party. He felt that at least thereafter the Movement, should pay attention to improve and promote the economic and political interests of the non-Brahmins. The members of the Self-Respect League were elected as the office-bearers of the Self-Respect Samadharma Party of South India also.[19]

The Samadharma Party was approved of by Self-Respect Conferences held in 1933 in Madras, North Arcot, Salem and Madurai Districts. The Madura Conference however suggested that the phrase "the aims and objects of the Samadharma Party of the Self-Respect Movement be amended and read as "the aims and objects of the Self-Respect Movement". As there was no Provincial Conference after 1931 Virudhunagar Conference, the formation of this new party was not ratified by a Provincial Conference. Among all the conferences held in 1933, the Madura Conference was an important one. In this Conference it was decided to select Tanjore as a model district and establish Self-Respect District, Taluk aud Villages.

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18 *Ibid*, 1 January, 1933.

19 *Ibid.*, 5 March, 1933. It was appealed through the columns of Kudi Arasu for the formation of branches and for the registration of them with the Headquarters League *Kudi Arasu*, 15 January, 1933.

A committee was also constituted for reviewing the progress of work.[20]

The popularity of the Self-Respect Movement had created a stir in several circles. "Mail" in its editorial dated 11 February, 1933 remarked that due to the propaganda of the Self-Respect Movement, finding a place for religious propaganda had become difficult. Religious discourses had to be confined only to the religious institutions and here also religion would disappear as in Russia it was believed. It advised Gandhi to stop the propaganda against untouchability and concentrate on the opposition to Self-Respect Movement.

## Atheism and Communism

For the spread of atheism they were supplied with materials from foreign countries. Rationalist Press Association of London, National Secular Council, American Association for the Advancement of Atheism and European Free Thinkers Association had been sending pamphlets on atheism. Regular translations of the works of Robert Ingersoll, Charles Bradlaugh and Betrand Russel appeared in Kudi Arasu. Singaravelu's vernacular articles appeared in Kudi Arasu containing abundant material for atheistic propaganda. He expounded the theories relating to the origin of religions and of the universe and on the many superstitious beliefs of the common people. Singaravelu contributed a series of articles entitled "The work before us". Several other articles also appeared in Kudi Arasu the common theme of which being the imperative need to follow in the footsteps of Russian Communism.[21]

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20 *Ibid.*, 9 April, 1933.

21 M. Singaravelu, *Vignana Muraiyum Mootanampikkiyum*, (Scientific methods and superstitions) (Erode, 1934). Typical of his views were these statements: "We are communists, nor anarchists nor syndicalis." Tomorrow the government is sure to put down outs Communism. But we do not fear. We will stand for it remembering the memorable words of Danton, the French patriot, 'Be bold: Be more

A biography of Lenin was translated into Tamil and serialized in "Samadharmam". Similarity in ideology between Self-Respect Movement and Communism was pointed out in Tamil weeklies like "Puratchi", "Pahuttarivu", "Samadharmam" and "Vedigundu" The Self-Respecters admiration for Russia showed itself flagrantly in a determined tendency to defend the Soviet Union in all matters under all circumstances. A case in point was the reaction of the Kudi Arasu to an affair of the imprisonment of two British engineers in Russia.[22]

The editorials of "Kudi Arasu" bears testimony to the change in the ideals of Self-Respect Movement.[23] E. V. R.'s disgust towards Capitalism was also further revealed through the columns

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bold: Be all the more bold :". Of the 30 crores in India, 4 crores are hardly able to get a single meal per day. Why? Because we have a capitalist regime here. On the other hand in Russia and there alone 16 crores of people live without feeling the pinch of hunger. Only on the day when the proletarian rule is established will the world get force from hunger and war" "As the communists in the legislatures of Germany, France, Belgium, Holland, Spain and Scandinavia work for their communist programme, we too will enter and work in the Indian legislatures, municipalities and district boards".

22 *Kudi Arasu*, 23 April, 1933.

23 "For the past 46 years we have seen the Congress and the work of the patriots Lokmaniyar, Desabandhus and Mahatmas who are its leaders We have also seen what good had come of it so far and we know what good will come in future ... Moreover we have likewise seen what the present Govt. is doing and what it had done during the past 160 years and we know what it will do hereafter... Even after this if we cherish our faith on and work for, the reform proposals of the Government and the political schemes of the Congress, we shall have to meet the same fate as the sheep which trusted in the butcher... In some way or other we are bound to destroy the rule of the Capitalists, the Zamindars and the Maharajas. We do not care who carries on the rule the British or the Indians or others. It is our duty to destroy it completely—*Kudi Arasu*, 1 January, 1933.

of Kudi Arasu.[24] When E. V. R. decided in favour of reconstructing the Movement based on socialistic principle, it was welcomed by a large section of members who had already been exposed to the Communist ideology through trade unions. M. Singaravelu was a labour leader of considerable eminence and an able exponent of theoretical Communism in Tamilnadu. In him E V. R. found a competent person to draw up a programme especially in view of his differences with S. Ramanathan.[25] Next to E. V. R., prominent Self-Respect leaders as Messrs. M. Singaravelu, A. Rathinasabapathy and A. Raghavan (who is known in Self-Respect circles as Sathankulam A. Raghavan) were quite as determined as their Chief in their advocacy of Communism.

Whatever might have happened in the past, the Self-Respect Movement was turning communistic rather fast. The first step was their admiration for Bolshevist Russia. It had no word of praise for any other country in the world. It regularly published very eulogistic articles about Russian conditions in the pages of its weeklies — "Kudi Arasu", "Vedigundu" and "Tamilan". The following are the headings of a few articles: Russia a new world; Russian progress (a serial); Public Health in Russia; The Advancement of Russian women; Don't be afraid of Russia; Truth about Russia. E. V. R. wrote "Russia is today a new world, differing from every other country... It has no place for jealousy, discontent, greed, rivalry and restlessness and has ensured for its people true liberty and freedom from the ordinary cares of life".[26] In the Self-Respect weekly "Tamilan", it was stated that, "Russia stands foremost among

24 "However there was no difference of opinion at the conference (the Madurai Self-Respect Conference) Capitalism and all Capitalistic Governments such as British should be rooted out. But it is no wonder that a few were afraid that a few things discussed that were against the law"- *Kudi Arasu*, 23April, 1933.

25 Sami Chidambaranar, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 147-148.

26 *Kudi Arasu*, 19 May, 1933.

the nations of the world in industry and in every other sphere also it is making progress. The reason is that it is a communist state."[27]

Speeches on Russia by fond admirers like G B Shah and others were quoted extenso A number of their articles also had been published to illustrate the Russian Revolution of 1917, the life and work of Karl Marx, the principles of Communism, the Five year plans etc. The mass of literature was further reinforced by a few books notably on the principles of Communism, on Lenin and on religion.

## May Day

May day celebrations by the Self-Respecters could be cited as an example of Russian influence. E. V. R. made an appeal to the Self-Respecters and Socialist Associations to celebrate it.[28] They organised Youth rallies and conducted public meetings. The Self-Respect Youth Leagues celebrated the May Day on 14 May, 1933 in various parts of the Presidency. Self-Respect leaders addressed several May Day meetings. Along with the May Day celebrations various branches of Samadharma party were formed. Though his wife died in 11 May 1933 E. V. R. actively participated in these activities.[29] He even felt happy for the death of his wife, for her death would relieve him

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27 *Tamilan*, 12 July 1933.

28 *Pahutharivu*, 14 May, 1933.

29 "Imperialism and Capitalism reign supreme everywhere all the legitimate rights of the labourers have been ignored and this evil has specially got rooted in India, which is in slavery for many years. The capitalists have ventured to famish labourers in the name of retrenchment, reduction of operatives and more hours of work. O Labourers! All of you should join together on May Day to demonstrate the strength of your unit for the working classes. Strive on this day to acquire the necessary courage, strength and unity for bringing down the mighty capitalist group and imperialism and for establishing a labour government on a socialistic basic" - *Pahutharivu*, 14 May, 1933.

from family burden and would facilitate him to concentrate on social reform activities more. As E. V. R. had no sons the death ceremonies were carried out by the party worker Mayavaram C. Natarajan in the Self-Respect way.

E V. R. declared at the North Arcot Self-Respect Conference held at Tiruppathur the communistic spirit that hovered around him.[30] E. V. R. once remarked that before the British Capitalistic Government and imperial power were destroyed the capitalistic rule in the Indian native states, their irresponsible tyranny and their repressive ways must disappear[31] In order to realise fully the weight of these editorials and declarations they should be read along with the following bold type slogans, "*Long Live Revolution: Let Monarchies Fall Everywhere: Let Republics Flourish Everywhere. Let Communism: Appear: Let Marxism Appear.*"

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30 This was the declaration of E. V. R.:

"How can we achieve social progress without working in the economic and political fields? Are not economics and politics necessary for a society? Our Self-Respect Movement is not all needed for attaining a progress which is not of the economic and political order If its sole work is to attack the puranic superstitions and the Brahmin machination, then it is better that it ceases to be... But what do we say? Away with the capitalistic government: Let us have a rule which will be to the advantage of the labourers.

"If we are true social workers we must destroy the cause of the above mentioned evils and cruelties. Whether it is God or religion or government the same must be done away with...

"We consider the government of the day as a shield of protection to the idle and the rich. A new one should therefore be set up wh ch will safeguard the interests of the poor and the workers. Those who think that by saying this we are running a great risk, better withdraw leaving us to face the danger alone. We are not afraid. But let them not obstruct us and prove traitors from within our ranks". – *Kudi Arasu*, 19 May, 1933.

31 *Ibid.*, 3 September, 1933.

In an interview, His Excellency Monsignor Leo Kirkels, Delegate Apostolic to the East Indies remarked "Red propaganda seeks to infiltrate through many avenue and for sometime past has made itself felt in South India through the so called Self-Respect Movement which attacks all religions". The "Madras Mail" supported this remark in an editorial in its issue of September 16, 1933. Both "His Excellency" and the 'Madras Mail" were criticised independently by A. Raghavan in the Kudi Arasu.[32]

Self-Respecters were accused of having a share in the 50 lakhs of rupees annually spent in India by Moscow. A. Raghavan derived that the Self-Respecters were red propagandists.[33] The same veiw of Raghavan was expressed by K. A. P. Viswanatham also. But in the same issue of the paper the editorial expressed satisfaction more than once at the Ezhavas of Malabar becoming imbued with the communist spririt.

From 15 May 1933 to July 1933 the Kudi Arasu ceased publication. Apparently because of the passing away of its publisher Mrs. E. V. R. Nagammaiar. From a note published in its issue of 16 July 1933 it would appear that the Government put hurdles for its publication. But whatever might be the reasons, the paper continued its Russian propaganda as vigorously as ever. The 10 September 1933 issue had a lengthy editorial on Communism. It concluded with a promise to deal with the subject still more elaborately on a subsequent occasion or to publish essays on it written by competent persons.

The spread of the Self-Respect Movement in South East Asia was also witnessed in this period. Its spread was due to the influence of Tamils living there. People of other nations except Tamils were never the followers of the Movement.

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32 *Ibid.*, 24 September, 1933.

33 Interview with A. Raghavan on 26 January, 1974.

Saigon Tamils had sent a sum of Rs. 314-8-0 (Rs. 314.50 ps.) for the publication of socialist books. With this amount a book called "Cosmogony" was published.

For the propagation of the Self-Respect faith, a Tamil language weekly entitled '*Puratchi*' (Revolt) was started by E. V. R. on 26 November, 1933. As regards its principal aims it declared that all capitalists and all religions must be destroyed and all people including women must live equally. The starting of 'Puratchi' was to counter the attempt of Government, which took action against Kudi Arasu.[34] In support of Self-Respect ideology a paper entitled '*Vedigundu*' (Bomb) was published from Madurai by Arumugam a councillor of the local municipality. The name itself would indicate the revolutionary nature of the paper.[35]

## Catholics vs Self-Respect Movement

Eventhough E. V. R. was concentrating on the spread of Communism, the regular activities of the Self-Respect Movement like the celebration of the Self-Respect marriages were taking place as usual. Under the auspices of the '*Tamilnadu Purohita Maruppu Sangam*' (Anti-Priesthood Association) (Trichy) several marriages were conducted. Not only the Tamil-speaking areas but also the non-Tamil speaking areas came under the system of the Self-Respect Marriages. In performing the marriages they did not confine their activities to Hindus only. In Tanjore alone not more than 150 Christians had married in the Self-Respect style. Hence the Self-Respecters had to face the opposition of the Catholics. The Catholic Youth Conference held at Tuticorin passed resolutions condemning the Self-Respect Movement.[36] In a Catholic Conference, held at Trichy

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34 *Puratchi*, 26 November, 1933.

35 *Kudi Arasu*, 27 August, 1933.

36 *Ibid.*, 5 June, 1933.

the Catholics were warned of excommunication if they had any truck with the Self-Respecters.[37]

Thus the Self-Respecters' attack came to be aimed at Christianity in addition to Hinduism. Some of the articles published in their magazines during the first half of 1933 ridiculed the teachings of Christ and questioned the morality of the Catholic priests. The Self-Respecters also directed their attention to those who were converted to Christianity. They pointed out that even after conversion their social status did not improve. By such propaganda they were able to keep away about 10,000 to 12,000 scheduled castes from the Church in Tanjore and Tiruchi districts. This was done neither to safeguard Hinduism nor to undermine Christianity. It was felt necessary as the message of Self-Respect had not reached the converted persons.

Their condemnation of Christianity did not go unchallenged. '*King's Rally*', an organ of the Catholics published articles criticising the attitude of the Self-Respecters Letters by Catholics rediculing the attack of the Self-Respecters on Christianity were published in the Madras Mail. Self-Respecters continued to proceed in their own way of attack without caring for the counter attack.

## E. V. R. in Prison

The government viewed the propaganda of the Self-Respecters with concern. It was felt that the spread of communism was the effect of this propaganda. In view of the mounting labour trouble the government resolved to bring the movement under control. Singaravelu and P. Jeevanantham took active roles in the political wing of the Movement and labour union activities. The leading article of Kudi Arasu under the title "Why the present Government should go" in its issue dated 29 October 1933 was adjudged to be seditious and for

37 *Ibid.*, 6 November, 1932.

which E. V. R. was to be punished.[38] A security of 1000 rupees each from the printer and the publisher of the paper was demanded and the paper itself soon ceased to exist.

On December 30, 1933 E. V. R. was arrested along with his sister *E. V. Kannammal* who was the editor of Puratchi. They were charged with instigating the people to overthrow the authority by force. E. V. R. instead of contending this charge preferred a written statement to G. W. Wells, I. C. S. the Collector of Coimbatore.[39] There he had stated that he had been propagating the principle of socialism in a democratic way. However, he was convicted for sedition and was sentenced to undergo nine months imprisonment and pay a fine of 300 rupees in default of which an additional imprisonment for one month. E. V. R. was confined in Coimbatore jail.[40]

## Inactivity

By this time the Movement had spread in many parts of Tamilnadu. As per an announcement in Kudi Arasu the formation of Leagues was to be reported to the Provincial Organization and registered. Kudi Arasu then published the number of organisations registered every week. Upto 1933 April 177 Leagues were registered and the number of leagues registered after that could not be ascertained. There were about 10,000 members in the organization.[41] About 30 conferences were held in the period of one year.[42]

The year 1934 was a dull period because there were no conferences after the internment of E. V. R. Executive Committee

38 *Puratchi*, 20 May, 1934; Sami Chidambaranar, *Tamilar Talaivar*, p. 152, After this '*Kudi Arasu*' was stopped for sometime and another paper 'Puratchi' appeared, E. V. R.'s sister Kannammal was the publisher.

39 Appendix VII.

40 Sami Chidambaranar, Op. Cit., pp. 155-156.

41 *Kudi Arasu,* 9 April, 1933.

42 *Ibid.*

of the Self-Respect Movement strictly issued instructions to party people not to convene conferences. As no conferences were convened in 1934 obviously no reports were printed with bold and arresting headlines in the important dailies. The Movement in spite of the leader's confinement in prison carried on its propaganda in favour of Communism and atheism.[43]

In the next meeting of the Executive Committee held at Tiruchi the previous stand regarding conferences was relaxed. In the second part of 1934 also no conference was held as the decision of the Executive meeting was not duly informed.[44] But a socialist conference was held in March 1934.[45]

The inactivity of the Central organisation could be noticed from the statement issued by Mayavaram C. Natarajan. C. Natarajan issued a statement for convening the Tanjore District Conference. In course of his statement he criticised that the Central body was inactive and that the state of affairs would be detrimental to the interest of the party. But S Ramanathan replied to this through 'Puratchi' that he should obey the central body as he was also a member of it and reminded him of its decision after the internment of E V. R.[46] He insisted that the conferences would not benefit much and unless each organisation collected 4 annas (25 p.) from its members and strengthened the organisation it would be a mere waste.[47]

E. V. R. met Rajaji in 1934 who was also serving imprisonment in Coimbatore. After a lapse of nine years, that is after the Conjeevaram Congress Conference, they met for the first time in prison. Rajaji invited E V. R. to join the Congress once again.

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43 Sami Chidambaranar, *Op. Cit.*, pp 155–156.
44 *Pahutharivu*, 30 December, 1934.
45 *Kings Rally*, October, 1934.
46 *Puratchi*, 17 June, 1934.
47 *Ibid.*

E. V. R. was prepared to rejoin the Congress provided a common programme was agreed upon between them. The most important aspect of the programme was that Tamilnadu Congress should agree to implement the principle of communal representation in all the representative bodies [48] As this was totally unacceptable to Gandhi, Rajaji's efforts to bring E. V. R. back into the Congress fold failed.

## His release and after

E. V. R. was released on 15 May, 1934.[49] Then he undertook a propaganda tour in the Southern Districts, visiting among other places Trichy where he presided over the meeting of the Central Executive Committee of the Self-Respect Movement He also performed Self-Respect marriages and addressed a well attended public meeting at the Municipal Public Hall.[50] The Government continued its activities of invigilation over the Movement.[51] When security was demandad of Kudi Arasu, it was replaced by Puratchi which in turn, for precisely the same reason was succeeded by Pahutharivu.[52] When Gandhi made a visit to the South for the collection of Harijan Fund, Self-Respecters conducted black flag demonstrations and argued with him on Varnashrama and Self-Respect principles.[53]

After his release from prison E. V. R. was requested by some Congress men to re-enter into the Congress fold. North

48 Sami Chidambaranar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 155.

49 *Kudi Arasu*, 20 May, 1934.

50 *Ibid.*

51 *Kudi Arasu*, 31 March, 1935; E. V. R. complained that since his return from Europe his activities were watched by the C. I. D.'S.

52 Pahutharivu was started by E. V. R. on 26 August, 1934. Its aim was destruction of the feeling of God, Caste, Religion, Nation and Self and to create love of man and unity among people — *Pahutharivu*, 26 August, 1934.

53 Sami Chidambaranar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 156.

Indian Leaders like Jayaprakash Narayanan (J. P.) met him and pleaded for his reunion with the Congress. Justice party leader Raja of Bobbili requested him to work in collaboration with his non-Brahmin Movement. He was earnestly wanted by both the parties. The popularity of the Self-Respect Movement might be the reason because both the parties had an eye over the forth-coming legislative assembly election.[54]

In October 1934 the Thirteenth Annual Conference of the Justice Party was held. All Justice party leaders except Raja of Bobbili did not favour the Erode programme. So the question of the Erode programme of E. V. R. was postponed to a later date. Earlier in his Presidential address at the South Indian Liberal Federation Confederation held in Madras on 29, 30 September, 1934 the Raja of Bobbili said,

> "May I here refer to a said activity that has in recent years, legitimately claimed a great deal of public attention, that is the part played by the Youth League and the Self-Respect Movement in South India... As I understand it the Self-Respect Movement stands for certain great ideals to make Hinduism greater and more glorious than that it was in the past, to rid of it all those absurdies which are the accretions of an unfortunate era of past and to write us in a solid federation so that all those who profess to follow the Hindu faith may feel that they are brethren following one of the most ancient religions of the world".[55]

When E. V. R. gave some plans which was called the Ten Point Programme for the Justice Party Conference held on 29, 30 November, 1934, he was criticised by Singaravelu that he was going against the policies enunciated by the 1932 Erode Conference.[56] E V R replied that he had given only the plan for the Justice party and not violated or gone against the principles of the Self-Respect Movement. None of these plans

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54 *Ibid.*, pp 156-158.

55 *Ibid.*

56 *Pahutharivu*, 25 September, 1934; Appendix VIII.

would affect the Self-Respect plans, he believed. He replied that in comparison with the Congressmen the Justicites were not worse politicians.[57]

The Self-Respecters had taken over the propaganda part of the work of the Justicites. They appealed to the people to vote for the Justicites on the plea that it was dominated and led by non-Brahmins. But the Congress with the object of political independence, sought a mandate for that from the electorate. The Samatanists or the orthodox Brahmins were not spared by them.[58] The result showed that the people responded to the call for Swaraj from the Congress. The Justice Party was routed.[59] This election debacle led to an anger towards E. V. R. and hence some of the leaders joined the Congress. E. V. R. whole heartedly accepted the defeat as his own. The executive committee of the Justice Party which met on November 1935 in Madras taken up for discussion a re-draft of the Ten Point Programme which was not considered at the meeting held on 1 October, 1934.[60] The drafted programme of E. V. R. was accepted in this meeting without much discussion. This shows the influence of E V. R. in the Justice Party even after the defeat of the Justice Party in the election.

## Rationalist Book Publishing Society

The activities of the Rationalist Book Publishing Society need a specific mention here. The Society which was a wing of the Movement continued its work during this period also. It had been registered as a limited company with its headquarter at Erode on 13 December, 1932. It was proposed to mobilise a capital of Rs. 30,000 to be raised by shares of Rs. 10. The object of the Rationalist Book Publishing Society was the

57 *Ibid*, 7, 14 October, 1934.
58 *Ibid*, 11 November, 1934; *Ibid*. 18 November, 1934.
59 *Kudi Arasu*, 8 January, 1934.
60 Appendix IX.

publication of Rationalist literature such as books written by Self-Respect leaders and translations of those of the Rationalist Press Association of London, in all the four important vernaculars of South India. To start with it printed books only in Tamil. Rationalist books were sold at a very cheap price. The total number of titles were about 20.[61]

Materialism[62] and Kudi Arasu Kalambagam were two books of 72 and 120 pages respectively by E. V. R. These were the collections of lectures delivered at various Self-Respect Conferences and editorials and other articles published in Kudi Arasu, Puratchi and allied papers. The books were a direct attack on God and religion and everything held sacred.

"*Scientific Methods and Ignorant Beliefs*" by Singaravelu, "*God and Why I Became a Sceptic* ?" by Ingersoll the famous American atheist, "*Has Religion made any useful contribution to civilization*?" by Betrand Russells, "*Is there life after death?*" by Joseph Mccabe, "*The celebacy of Priests*" by Rev. G. Townshend Fox of Durham and "*Women and the Confessional*" were some of the books published by the Society.[63]

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61 A. Raghavan who was in charge of this Society gave details about RBPS at Tirunelveli when the author met him on 26 January, 1974; Appendix X.

62 The theme of 'Materialism' can be deducted from the following passage : "God, Religion, Soul, Self, Sin, Virtue, Heaven, Hell, Morality are all nothing but man's concoction To put it more plainly, they are the creation of small class of selfish paraistic priests who in order to have of the benefits of this earth to themselves, induce the people to renounce this world for the sake of possessing the next. They should be destroyed by the Rationalists who ought to endeavour to reclaim the priest ridden masses from faith in the supernatural things and make them materialists. The inventions of priest craft -- God, Soul, Heaven, Hell, Sin, Virtue, Morality must be pulverized under the sledge hammer strokes of scientific progress — Long Live Materialism" — *Kings Rally,* January, 1935.

63 *King's Rally,* Vol XII, 1935.

The Catholics lodged a protest against these publications and so the Government of Madras took action by demanding from the editor and the publisher of the Kudi Arasu a security of Rs. 1000 each on the ground of causing discontent between one section and another of His Majesty's subjects in the Presidency. When Pope Pius XI was informed of the activities of the Rationalist Book Publishing Society the following appeal was made by him to the people of Tamilnad.

> "We wish them that through Catholic Action the Catholic Press in your country should be strengthened and multiplied as occasion demands and above all that every Christian family should take a Catholic paper which faithfully echoes the teachings of the Church and thereby becomes a valuable anxiety to the Church's ministry."[64]

What was the opinion of the Catholic about the publications of the Rationalist Book Publishing Society? They opined : "These are mere reprints in Tamil of the irrational beliefs and base calumnies long ago exploded by the West and they give the measure of the reasonableness and Self-Respect of the so called 'Self-Respecters'.

They have enslaved their reason to worthlessness and noisy demogogues like Ingersoll and call themselves Self-Respecters".[65] "When they issue translations of Western Books attacking religion in general and the Catholic religion in particular, they are either ignorant in one case or that of aware of the numerous refutations of them which have been published in the Western Countries. This action is therefore that of an ignorant in one case or that of a knave in the other, both equally disreputable. If no other means are available to teach them common sense and Self-Respect the law courts may do it as they have already done to American and English detractors from whom they draw evil inspiration."[66]

64 *Ibid.*, January, 1935.
65 *Ibid.*
66 *King's Rally.*

Examining 18 out of 52 issues of Puratchi which are now available and 4 out the 7 numbers of the Pahutharivu of 1934 and the Kudi Arasu published in January 1935 we come across five reports of meeting and other functions from the Self-Respect Youth Association, Madras, 3 from the Pahutharivu Reading Room of Madras, 2 from the Central Self-Respect League of Madras, 9 from the Self-Respect Associations in Trichy, Golden Rock and Srirangam, 4 from the Self-Respect Association of Nagapattinam, 2 from Madura and 1 each from the Self-Respect Associations of Dindigul, Tuticorin and Kumbakonam. It must be noted that these associations do not in any way exhaust the list of branches of the Self Respect League and that they have held more meetings than they had reported. Moreover they had all along carried out the full Self-Respect Programme, which included communistic propaganda. This is clear from a glance at the subjects dealt with at their meetings. The topic discussed by the Self-Respect Youth Association of Madras included materialism, socialism, religion as a fun to progress and others of the kind.

The vitality of the movement was still more in evidence in its effective use of the Press. Its official weekly organ had held itself firm inspite of the repressive measures of the Government. On 13 January, 1935 the old Kudi Arasu was revived, the first issue being numbered from where it had snapped off in November, 1933. Its reappearance marked a triumph of the Movement. 'Tamilan', a magazine published from Kolar Gold Fields spread rank atheism during the years 1933-1935.

The government made a search in the offices of Kudi Arasu, Rationalist Book Publishing Society and the house of E. V. Krishnasami the dejure editor of the Self-Respect weekly organ on 20 January, 1935 and in the office of 'Samadharma' of Jolarpet on 21 January and these searches have led to the arrest of E. V. Krishnasami and Jeevanandam the Honarary

Editor of the Samadharmam on a charge of sedition under section 124 A IPC. It demanded a security of Rs. 3000 from 'Samadharma'. Consequently the publication itself was stopped since the last week of December 1934. Government also launched proceedings and demanded securities against *Pahutharivu* and '*Capital*' two Self-Respect monthlies planned for publication respectively from Erode and Nagapattinam."[67] Jeevanandam had translated Bagat Singh's "Why I became an Atheist" into Tamil and the same was published by "Unmai Vilakkam Press" of E. V. R. The book was confiscated by the Government. Though the Justicites were in power, this action was taken as per the instruction of the India Government.

The Self-Respecters continued to believe in the efficacy of Communism as the cure of all the ills of the world. In the issue of Pahutharivu highly eulogistic articles about Russia appeared. The followers felt that if any action was not taken to safeguard it the work so far done would become a colossal waste. Hence he was empowered to do anything to preserve it.

## E. V. R.'s Statement

E. V. R. issued a statement to the press on March 6, 1935 which purported to explain the true aims and objects of the Self-Respect Movement. Such a statement he claimed was needed at that time in order to clear up certain misconceptions instilled into the public mind by hostile propaganda. But what he did not say and yet was obvious from a careful reading was that it was issued really to put the Government off its guard, and everyone could see how opportune this move in view of the repressive measures taken such as security proceedings against the Self-Respect papers and prosecution of the Self-Respect leaders for sedition.[68]

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67 *King's Rally*, March 1935.

68 *Justice*, 6 March, 1935; *Kudi Arasu*, 10 March. 1935; Appendix XI.

The text of the statement :

> "I have observed that, for sometime past a great deal of misunderstanding has been caused in the mind of the public about the aims of the objective of the Self-Respect Movement. This misunderstanding is in a large measure due to the misrepresentations and malicious propaganda on the part of the enemies of the Movement It has therefore become necessary to give a re-statement of what the Movement stands for, so that the public may not be labouring under the false ideas regarding the Movement.
>
> "Broadly stated the Self-Respect Movement has from its inception aimed at ameliorating the conditions of the depressed and the oppressed communities of South India and to raise the status of our women. To realize the main object of the Movement, it has become necessary to work along political, economic and social lines. As one who is largely responsible for the inception of the Movement I propose to restate our aim in these three sphere."[69]

On the whole the statement of E. V. R. proved that a realistic stand was taken by him for the preservation of the Movement from the onslaught of the Government.[70] As the issue of Kudi Arasu which carried E. V. R.'s statement contained an advertisement regarding the publication of the Rationalist Book Publishing Society's 20th book which was an anti-Catholic work by Jean Meslier as apostle priest, the 'King's Rally' commented. "If by such a misleading statement Mr. Naicker (E. V. R.) hopes to throw a veil over the Godless and Communistic activities of the Self-Respect Movement we hasten to tell him that the mask is too thin if not wholly transparent."[71]

In this connection the Catholic reaction is to be noted. In its issue of 1 June, 1935, the Catholic Leader wrote thus:

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69 *Justice*, 6 March, 1935.

70 *Ibid.*, 6 March, 1935.

71 *King's Rally*, April–May, 1935.

> "The Self-Respect Movement which gave cause for some anxiety to Catholics two years ago had ceased recently to draw public attention. Thanks to the vigorous agitation of Catholics and the timely step taken by Government, its authentic and Communistic tendencies were unmasked and the Movement itself received a decided and definite set back. Over 85% of the Catholics who had been misled by designing leaders and fallen victims to their propaganda represented of their conduct and reconciled themselves to the church The Movement seems to have been in its last legs but its smouldering members have apparently rekindled if we are to judge by the proceedings of conference of Self-Respect held recently in Tanjore...".

But another Catholic monthly King's Rally, did not accept the above statement and remarked,

> "We should like very much to believe that during the last two years the Self-Respect Movement was in a dying condition and that now it shows just a faint revival presumably before the final collapse. But facts do not support such a belief. The truth is that the Self-Respect Movement neither was nor is in its earliest agony and we regret as every Catholic should that it is so."

E V. R.'s announcement that he had stopped the propagation of Samadharma principles was not liked by some of his followers. P. Jeevanandam, A. Raghavan, Neelavathi, Vallatharasu and others left the Movement and formed Self-Respect Samadharma League. They took his words and rushed into press to berate him for his 'cowardly climb down'. Meanwhile he merely kept chucking in his sleeves that his camouflage had started well.[72] And in very truth his statement of March 6, 1935 was no more than a camouflage.

On behalf of the Self-Respect Samadharma League '*Arivu*' was published by A. Raghavan. P. Jeevanandham published '*Samadharmam*', and T. S. Ramachandran published

72 *Ibid.*, August, 1935.

'*Puthuulagam*' from Nagappattinam. Their complaint was that the Self-Respect Movement of E. V. R. was not formed on scientific lines.[73]

The executive committee of the Justice Party met on 15 November, 1935 in Madras. A redraft of the Ten point programme which was not considered for want of time at its meeting on 1 October, 1934 had been taken for discussion. Except one related to religion the redrafted programme was accepted and adopted. But a section led by Ramanathan criticised the decision of the Justice party. The controvercy of S. Ramanathan was not a new one. Even in the month of April 1935 he had issued a statement in the press questioning the right of E V. R. to seek shelter within the folds of the Justice Party.[74]

K. M. Balasubramaniam in a rejoinder to Ramanathan remarked, "Mr. Ramanathan is not entitled to say that the Self-Respect Movement will not bend itself to the purposes of Mr. Naicker The whole rank and file of the Movement will stand by Mr. Naicker and definitely repudiate Mr. Ramanathan. I challenge him to put it to test". He further pointed out that the Movement did not merely stand for social equality as Ramanathan suggested. Economic betterment of the masses was equally an important programme. He criticised that as a student of economics Ramanathan would not have forgotten the fact that the problems of economics were so inextricably inter-twined with politics that one cannot separate the two. "No politics no economics". He therefore requested Ramanathan not to be a tool in the hands of the very men whom he had taught to distrust and thus caste a stone at the Justice-cum-Self-Respect Movement. He was asked to resign his post of Secretaryship and "plough his lonely burrow and not to attempt

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73 *Arivu*, October, 1936.

74 Appendix XII.

the impossible". V. S. Shanmugam also criticised S. Ramanathan for having called the leader of the Movement as 'one of the Vice-Presidents'.[75]

But Ramanathan continued to believe that active politics would lead to the failure of great Social Movement. He hoped that the exploitation of the Self-Respect Movement for political purpose would redound to the discredit of those who did so. As opposition mounted against his idea he had nothing to do except leaving the Movement. He who believed, though his views had been discredited at Erode in 1932, that E. V. R. would not allow the Movement to drift towards party politics, lost his faith in him and left the Movement.

75 *Justice*, (Tamil), 11 April, 1935.

# 5

# Metamorphosis of the Self-Respect Movement

## (1936 — 1940)

In this chapter we may notice the after effects of Self-Respect Movement for having leant towards Communism. With the decline of the Justice Party, we do not notice a corresponding decline of the Self-Respect Movement but only a transformation of the same. In this period E. V. R. emerges as the leader of the Justice Party. In turn the Self-Respecters became Justicites. Another feature of this period was the agitation against Hindi. In this period the seed for the future political party i. e. Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam was sown by the entry of C. N. Annadurai, belovedly called by the masses as 'Anna' (Elder Brother). His association with E. V. R. and the Self-Respect Movement provided the basic ideals and training for his political

leadership in later days. There was comparatively none who was so closer to E. V. R. as Anna. We also note a strange coincidence in this period. Two eminent Non- Brahmins namely E. V. R and Kamaraj emerged as the leaders of the two political parties namely Justice Party and Tamilnad Congress respectively. Though the choice of E. V. R. for the leadership of the Justice Party was made in the year 1938, final enthronment took place only in 1940. In the same year Kamaraj became the leader of Congress in Tamilnadu and continued to hold it till his death.

Though the activities of the Self-Respect Movement in this period was mostly political they were mostly tinged with the social and cultural ideals of the Self-Respect Movement. In the District Board election held in the last quarter of 1935 and in the first half of 1936 the Justicites who were supported by the Self-Respecters met a crushing defeat.[1] The District Board election brought home to the leaders of the Justice Party the truth that the forces of distintegration had already set in and they could not be checked. The defeat had a psychological effect on the Justicites and they began to doubt the future of the party. As in 1926, this time also they even thought of merging the Justice Party with the Congress. Leaders like Natesa Mudaliar openly pleaded for merger with the Congress if the latter accepted the principle of communal representation.[2] E. V. R. met Rajaji on 3 June 1936 for this purpose. But neither Rajaji nor the Tamilnad Congress was willing to pay any heed to this proposal.

As the first election under the new 1935 Government of India Act was scheduled for February 1937, Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu, T. A. Ramalingam, Dr. Subbarayan and S. Ramanathan were some of the few leading persons who aspired for position through Congress ticket and joined the Congress. The Justice Party could not match the new methods employed and the new prospects

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1 C. J. Baker, *The Politics of South India*, p. 270.
2 *Mail,* 20 January, 1936.

promised by the Congress in the election that took place on 18 February 1937.

When the results were announced it showed a sweeping victory for the Congress against the Justicites. Congress had won all but 9 of the 146 general seats and 159 of the 215 seats overall. Justicites such as the Raja of Bobbili, P. T. Rajan and A. P. Patro were all defeated. The emotional appeal for Purna Swaraj by the Congress, hostility of the press and the entry of a third force which was called People's Party of Maharaja of Pithapuram,[3] were the major causes for the debacle of the Justice Party. Congress victory in all of the other provinces[4] also was most striking.

In the Madras Province, Congress Ministry was formed under the presidentship of C. Rajagopalachari. Out of the ten ministers and ten council secretaries four in each were Brahmins.[5] Soon after the formation of the Government by Rajaji,[6] it was criticised by both the Justicites and Self-Respecters as "Brahmin Raj". In the city of Madras, posters were put up describing the government as 'Brahmin Raj'.[7] These posters had the desired effect at least among the non-Brahmin Congress-men if not in the mind of all people. Rajaji was accused by some Congressmen of perpetrating sectarianism in the Congress.[8] But the inclusion in the ministry of Subbarayan and Ramanathan who were sympathisers of the Self-Respect Movement was an act of cleverness of the part of Rajaji. It allayed the fears of non-Brahmins to a great extent.

Among the activities of the Rajaji's ministry the imposition of compulsory Hindi on primary school children was a capital

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3 *Hindu*, 16 May, 1936.

4 *Hindu and Mail*, 27 February, 1937.

5 *Mail*, 14 July, 1937.

6 C. Rajagopalachari was called by a shortened form as Rajaji.

7 *Mail*, 19 July, 1937.

8 *Sunday Observer*, 10 July, 1937.

blunder. It was considered as the gravest stroke of political fascism and a god-sent weapon into the hands of the opposition. It provided the opposition with "the shin of beef and gin and basket of meat" in plenty.[9] The subject provided the Self-Respecters with a sound platform, a sentimental war cry, a sword of sharp edge and soul stirring slogan. Not only the Self-Respecters but also the entire people of Tamil Nadu were aflame with indignation.

A press meet was held on 12 July 1937 before the formation of the ministry. In that meeting Rajaji stressed the need for a common language for India and spoke of the fitness of Hindi and justified its choice to be the lingua franca of the country[10]. An announcement was made by him for the introduction of Hindi as a cumpulsory subject in the school syllabus for the first three 'Forms'.[11] The introduction of Hindi was viewed upon as the imposition at the bayonet's end of an alien tongue, an off-shoot of Sanskrit and hand maid of the Aryans on an unwilling race of Dravidians who had come under the sway of Brahmin Raj. This was the plausible construction that the plain man in the street was given and he believed it.

To emphasize his stand, Rajaji said that it was spoken by a large number of people in the widest possible area of India.[12] The Self-Respecters condemned the introduction of Hindi for two reasons. One was that it would help the spread of Aryan culture in Tamil Nadu and the other was that it would benefit only the Brahmins. It was argued that the Brahmins would find it easier to learn Hindi because of their knowledge of Sanskrit with which Hindi was connected and thereby attain high positions under government while the Non-Brahmins who had no knowledge

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9 K. M. Balasubramaniam, Periyar E. V. Ramasami, p. 25.
10 *Mail*, 12 July, 1937.
11 *Mail* and *Hindu*, 11 August, 1937.
12 *Mail* and *Hindu*, 27 August, 1937.

of Sanskrit would lag behind. Even at the Virudhunagar Conference of 1931 it was condemned and pointed out that it would benefit only the Sanathanists.[13]

One Stalin Jagadeesan a Self-Respecter, commenced at Madras a fast unto death from 1 May, 1938 as a protest against the imposition of Hindi.[14] Vidudalai, E. V. R.'s Daily published everyday box-news indicating the number of days which have expired after his fast.[15] After ten week Jagadeesan was persuaded to break his fast. But in Kudi Arasu E. V. R. wrote a series of inflammatory editorials against the imposition of Hindi.[16]

While addressing a meeting at Triplicane in Madras, Rajaji emphasized that the surest way to spread Hindi in South India was to make it a 'compulsory subject of study'. He had also proclaimed that as long as he was in charge of the administration of the Province he could not avoid doing a thing in which he had complete faith. He further added that he would not be true to himself and to his principles if he did not put into practice those principles.[17] This proclamation proved to be the signal for anti-Hindi agitators to intensify their campaign. Anti-Hindi meetings increased more and more in number. The agitators had chosen the Hindu Theological High School at Mint as the venue for demonstration in Madras. Picketing educational institutions helped the agitators to spread their ideals easily. The government took stern action against the agitators.

The Self-Respect leaders planned to organise a march from Trichy to Madras in order to whip up public opinion

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13 E. V. R. wrote even in 1926 that Hindi would benefit Brahmins only — *Kudi Arasu*, 7 March, 1926.

14 *Mail*, 2 May, 1938.

15 Vidudalai File, May 1938 to July 1938.

16 *Kudi Arasu*, 8 May, 1938.

17 *Mail* and *Hindu*, 17 June, 1938.

against the imposition of Hindi and to kindle a greater awareness among the masses of the dangers of the same. In their task they received the co-operation of the members of the Muslim League also. E. V. R., Pattukkottai Alagirisami, R. Tirumalaisamy, Muvalur Ramamirtham Ammal and Khallifullah met at Trichi a week before the scheduled date to choose suitable volunteers for the above programme.[18] About 500 people gave their names for the proposed march.

I Kumaraswami Pillai, a leading lawyer of Tanjore was selected to lead the march with hundred and one able bodied men. A detailed programme was prepared giving information regarding the dates and times of arrival and departure of the marchers at different places. On 1 August, 1938 a farewell meeting of the processionists was held at Town Hall Square in Trichi. After that they started their historic march. Within 42 days of their march they addressed 87 public meetings with an aggregate attendance by over 5,00,000 people. They took a long route and covered 234 villages and 60 mofussil towns in the course of their march.[19] This not only helped the strengthening of the opposition to Hindi but also gave a boost to the Self-Respect Movement itself. The Self-Respect leader E. V. R. undertook the task of consolidating the gains of the Hindi Agitation. He began to form brigades in each district A Self-Respect brigade was formed at Coimbatore on 12 September, 1938 and the example was followed by North Arcot, Salem, Trichy, Ramnad and Madurai Districts.[20]

During the second half of 1938 E. V. R. began to dominate the Anti-Hindi Agitation. His speeches published in Kudi Arasu and Vidudalai gave an impression that he was the virtual leader of the Anti-Hindi Agitation. He was of course supported by A. T Pennirselvam, W. P. A. Soundarapandian, Nedumbalam

18 Aladi Aruna, *Indhi Ekathipathiam*, pp. 45-46

19 Aladi Aruna, *Ibid.*, p. 46

20 *Sunday Observer*, 11 September, 1938.

Samiappa and Khaliffullah in the Anti-Hindi Agitation and they saw in him a magnetic leader capable of arousing the masses, mobilizing and channelling their energies to fight for a cause. Naturally it led to the popularity of the Self-Respect Movement. The Movement itself depended entirely on E. V. R. Consequently he had attracted the attention of the Government which took action against him.

Vidudalai office was raided on 5 October, 1938 as it had acted as an unofficial organ of the Anti-Hindi Campaign. Some of the back numbers of Vidudalai were confiscated by the police along with the account book and all other correspondence relating to the Agitation. For the publication of certain articles which blamed the Aryans, E. V. R. and Pandit Muthusami Pillai were arrested and charged for anti-government activities and were refused bail also. They were found guilty of disrupting communal harmony and sentenced to six months simple imprisonment.[21] E. V. R. was also charged of inciting women to picket the Hindu Theological High School. When he was addressing the Tamilnad Women's Conference on 13 and 14 November, 1938 he explained why women should oppose Hindi imperialism.[22] His speech at Tamizhar Kazhagam on 14 September kindled the spirit of women and they began to participate in the Agitation in large numbers.[23] Such provocative speeches formed the basis of the charge sheet framed against E. V. R. But the case was not taken up by the court before the first week of December 1938.

E V R. preferred not to contest the case. He explained that no fair judgement could be delivered by the judiciary which was under the control of the Congress Government. So he refused even to cross-examine the witnesses when he was tried on 5 December, 1938. However when the prosecution evidence was

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21 M. Ilanchelian, *Tamilan Toddutta Mudal Por,* p. 84.

22 *Kudi Arasu,* 19 November, 1938.

23 *Kudi Arasu,* 19 September, 1938; *Indian Social Reformer,* 17 December, 1938.

closed, E V. R. wanted the copies of the deposition of witnesses in order to file a statement by which he thought he would prevent the public from forming a wrong impression over his innocence.[24]

In his statement issued subsequently he said that the opposition to Hindi was started soon after the Self-Respect Conference held at Nannilam, Tanjore District in 1930 but not after the publication of the government order on 21 April, 1938 as contended by the Government; that the picketings before the Premier's house and the Hindu Theological School were intended not to coerce the Premier but to show the Government that the Anti-Hindi Agitation had public support; that none of his speeches including those that were referred to in the charge sheet, had incited any person to break the law of the state, and that such being the case, he was not guilty of any of the charges framed[25]

However, E. V. R. was sentenced to undergo one year rigorous imprisonment and pay a fine of 1000 rupees each in respect of the offences on which he was convicted. In default of payment of the fine, he was ordered to undergo rigorous imprisonment for another six months on each count but these jail terms were to run concurrently.[26] The verdict passed on E. V. R was too severe for an offence like this Even after the internment of the leader E. V. R., the Self-Respecters continued the agitation.

The Justice Party affairs during this period need a mention here in order to explain the activities of Self-Respect Movement. Raja of Bobbili who had supported the cause of the Anti-Hindi Agitation unexpectedly resigned his leadership in the Justice Party. The Raja's resignation was not without its repurcussions.

24 *Kudi Arasu*, 10 December, 1938; *Mail* and *Hindu*, 6 December, 1938

25 *Mail* and *Hindu*, 6 and 7 December, 1938.

26 Sami Chidambaranar, *Tamilar Talaivar*, p. 191.

It caused an uneasy situation in the Justice Party. The offer of the leadership of the Party was declined by K. V. Reddi Naidu, A. P. Patro, P. T. Rajan, M. A. Muthaiah Chettiar and A. T. Panneerselvam one after the other.[27] It was suggested by some that E. V. R. was the most competent person to lead the party. The Executive Committee and Reception Committee held a joint meeting in Madras under the Presidentship of Doraiswami Mudaliar. Muthaiah Chettiar moved a resolution requesting E. V. R. to preside over the annual confederation. This resolution was supported by Panneerselvam and K. C. Subramania Chettiar.

The Fourteenth Confederation of the Justice Party began its three day session at Madras on 29 December, 1935 with a large procession from Varadarajapuram in Egmore to the venue of the Confederation on Island Grounds. The centre of attraction in the procession was a chariot on which four life-size portraits, of E. V. R. were put up. The processionists shouted 'Long Live E. V. R.' and 'Long Live Tamil'. The Confederation was attended by more than 1000 delegates and 100,000 visitors. At the request of the members of the executive committee, Panneerselvam was deputised to act on behalf of E. V. R. as the President of the Confederation. All throughout he refrained from occupying the Presidential chair and kept it vacant to show his respect for E. V. R. who was in prison. Many leading Justicites and Self-Respecters like Alagirisamy and A. Ponnambalam addressed the audience.

E. V. R. 's stand on communal justice, his opposition to Hindi and his call for independent Tamilnad were put in the form of resolutions and were adopted unanimously as the future programme of the Justice Party. At this time, E. V. R. who was in jail fell ill. As the news of his illness spread out, telegrams pleading for the scrapping of compulsory Hindi

27 Interview with M. A. Muthaiah Chettiar at Madras on 28th July, 1974.

and the release of E. V. R. were sent to Netaji Subas Chandra Bose, the then President of the Indian National Congress and to the Premier and the Chief Secretary to the Government of Madras. The mounting demand for the immediate release of E. V. R. placed the Government in a dilemma and he was transferred from Bellary Central Jail on 17 February, 1939.[28] The Anti-Hindi Agitation took two lives as its toll. Talamuthu and Natarajan the two volunteers lost their lives Even after his transfer to the Bellary Jail E. V. R.'s health further deteriorated and caused anxiety among his followers. As his condition became serious in May, 1939 he was released from jail on 22 May 1939[29] After the release of the leader the other Anti-Hindi Agitators were also released before the expiry of their period of conviction.[30]

E. V. R. and the Self-Respecters could not keep quite and they were further drawn into agitations over other issues if not on the issue of Hindi. Rajaji enacted the legislation for the introduction of prohibition in Tamil Nadu. Even though E. V. R. had sympathy with the temperance Movement, he neither welcomed this piece of social lesgislation nor appreciated it. He viewed it from a communal angle. Hatred for the Congress shrowded his mind and he failed to see the benefits of prohibition. He declared that the legislation was a device to give more appointments to Brahmins than Non-Brahmins in public service.[31]

The executive committee of the Justice Party met on 11 August 1930 at E. V. R.'s residence. It was the first meeting after he became the President. The fiscal and language policies of the Government were discussed and it was decided

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28 *Viduthalai*, 30 December, 1938.

29 Sami Chidambaranar, *Tamilar, Talaivar* p. 199, B. S. Ilango, *Theogarayar Mudal Dr. Kalignar Varai*, (From Theogaraya to Dr. Kalignar), (Madras, 1975), p. 180.

30 *Kudi Arasu*, 10 June, 1939.

31 *Ibid.*, 22 June, 1939.

to set right the damages caused by them. The executive committee unanimously decided to 'work for the overthrow of the Congress Ministry.'[32] Thus the Self-Respecters mortgaged their social ideals to a political end. But they believed that their ideals could be achieved only by taking such a political stand But it led to a suspicion that their real aim was political gain and not social reforms.

The Temple Entry Safeguard Bill made it possible for the Harijans in the Malabar districts to enter and offer worship in the temples. The Bombay Congress Ministry gave a lead in legislation against discrimination in eating houses and other public places. Gandhi's sympathy and work for the Harijans has by this time created an atmosphere for the introduction of such social reform legislation. The vast changing developments also warranted radical steps. The comprehensive Temple Entry Bill which was prepared by M. C. Raja, a leader of the Scheduled Castes was abandoned and a limited measure to open temples in Malabar was taken up by C. R. on the plea that it was only in that part of the Province the ground for such a radical social legislation had been prepared by the Travancore Temple Entry Proclamation[33] It was only later C. R. allowed his hands to be forced and followed the Bombay examples. First an indemnity ordinance, and then a hastily adopted law which enabled trustees to throw open their temples to Harijans, were brought forward by C. R. while the Bombay Act necessitated the trustees to obtain the sanction of the Judiciary,- Rajaji only wanted them to secure the permission of the Government.

C. R. expected opposition to the entry of Harijans into Hindu temples only from the Sanatanists. As expected by him they started agitations. But he never expected opposition from

32 *Ibid*, 19 August, 1939

33 S. Natarajan *A Century of Social Reform in India*, p. 173.

E. V. R and his followers But the opposition did come from E. V. R who allowed himself to be swayed by political considerations. He had taken a stand that the Congress must be destroyed at any cost. The result was the sacrifice of his social reform activity.

He went to the extent of explaining them that he had no personal hatred of Brahmins based on caste considerations and that he wanted both Non-Brahmins and Brahmins to live like brothers. To the Sanathanist he said that they should not support the 'Political Brahmins' and appealed them to stand for the progress of the country by joining the Justice Movement.[34] How far E. V. R. would have succeeded in winning the Sanathanists over to his side is a matter of speculation. Owing to the outbreak of the Second World War in September the political situation in the country took an unexpected turn. The Madras ministry resigned in 1939 along with the Congress ministries in other provinces.

When executive committee of the Justice Party met on 28 October, 1939 to consider the resignation of the Congress ministry and various other matters, an unanimous decision was reached to support the British Raj. in its 'hour of trial'. Finally the Party decided that to work for the independence of Tamilnad should be the 'principal post-war' demand of the Justice Party.[35]

E. V. R. was criticised by the national newspapers like Swadesamitran, Dinamani and Mail. They were unanimous in condemning him and the Justice Party for this policy They viewed that it would undermine the unity of the country and was not only mischievous but also dangerous.[36] They deplored that the Justice Party which was a great political party had declined into a narrow and separatist sect E. V. R. maintained that the

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34 *Kudi Arasu*, 27 August and 3 September, 1938; *Mail*, 28 August and 5 September, 1939.

35 *Kudi Arasu*, 5 November, 1939; *Mail*, 29 October and 15 November, 1939.

36 *Swadesamitran*, 18 November, 1939.

concept of the Tamil nation was nothing new but had been there since the inception of the Justice Party.

Kudi Arasu pointed out that the geographical boundary of the Tamil nation would approximate to the territory of the composite state of Madras and the adjoining territories where the four major Dravidian linguistic groups lived.[37] E. V. R. attempted in the early months of 1940 to gain national recognition for his demand by meeting all India leaders like Jinnah, V. P. Jadav and M. R. Jayakar. He received only the moral support from them. This meeting made the Self-Respecters to concentrate on national policies.

The fifteenth Justice Confederation met at Tiruvarur on 24 and 25 August 1940.[38] Anna, W. P. A. Soundarapandian, P. T. Rajan and K. A. P. Viswanatham proposed and seconded the name of E. V. R. for the Presidentship. The confederation was significant for E. V. R. was unanimously elected as the President for a second term. E. V. R. who was made the President of the Justice Party in absentia last time, now occupied the position in person. In the 14th Confederation his portrait was adorned but now he was adorned in person. While he became the President of the Justice Party, Kamaraj who was born in a middle class family and belonged to a backward community became the leader of the Tamilnad Congress.[39]

The non-Brahmin wave had an effect in the Congress also. The Brahmin leaders did not like to come to the forefront directly but chose to remain behind the screen and instigate the non-Brahmins to function according to their wishes. In the election for the Presidentship of Tamil Nadu Congress Committee

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37 *Kudi Arasu*, 26 November, 1939.

38 B. S. Ilango, *Op. Cit.*, p. 181.

39 Ma. Po. Si., *Enathu Porattam* (My Agitation), (Madras, 1974), pp. 169-172

Kamaraj was backed by Satyamoorthy and Coimbatore Subbiah was backed by Rajaji. This brings out the influence of the Self-Respect ideal in the Congress circles. Satyamoorthy's candidate and disciple, Kamaraj won by a majority of two votes. This leadership made him more familiar among the masses and from this position he rose to the position of the man of masses till his death in October 2, 1976. For his rise E. V. R. and his partymen were indirectly responsible.

## EPILOGUE

Thus after the Fifteenth Confederation the Self-Respect Movement had merged into the Justice Party and E V. R. became its virtual leader. So far, he was leading his Self-Respect Movement towards social reform without concentrating deeply on politics. Now as a leader of a political party, he had to take action in the capacity of a political leader than as a social reformer. In the above mentioned conference it was decided to strengthen the Justice Party by approaching eminent non-Brahmins who had cut off their connections with the party since the 1937 election and to draft a constitution for the still-born 'Dravidanadu'. But the committee appointed for the above purpose failed to function from the day of its appointment. The reason for its failure was none other than E. V R.[40]

E V. R. felt that the crying need of the country was the abolition of all social inequalities rather than political independence.[41] At that time the Second World War was raging

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40 M A. Muthia Chettiar. personal interview on 24 July, 1974 at Madras with the author.

41 *Sunday Observer*, 25 May, 1941 — E. V. R. started a local agitation at Trichy protesting against the exclusive dining arrangements made for Brahmin passengers in the railway canteen and this practice was put to an end in May, 1941, Ibid

all over the world and Great Britain which was ruling India was fully occupied with it. Hence E. V. R. advised his followers to postpone their demand for Dravidanadu till the end of the war in order to help the government in its war efforts.[42] He put off the demand without even consulting the committee appointed for the purpose.

During the War, to explain to the leaders of the principal section of the Indian people, the British Government's proposals for the realization of Self-Government for India, the 'Cripps Mission' was appointed. Without the approval or consultation of the committee, E. V. R. sent a delegation to the Mission.[43] This action of E. V. R. was considered by some of the Justice Party Members as undemocratic and autocratic. He was opposed both by the young and the experienced Justice Members. One of the prominent leaders who opposed him was P. T. Rajan. Those who opposed him decided to make R. K. Shanmugam Chettiar as the leader of the Justice Party in his place but they could not succeed. In June 1942, K. A. P. Viswanatham who had been the General Secretary since 1939 made fourteen charges against E. V. R. and resigned his office.[44] His resignation was accepted and Anna was appointed as the General Secretary. This was made to satisfy the young members of the party. But E. V. R. had to face the continued opposition from some of the Members of the Justice Party.

In July 1944 E. V. R. announced the holding of the Sixteenth Confederation of the Justice Party at Salem in August the same year.[45] This announcement was welcomed by both the young and the senior members of the party. E. V. R.

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42 *Ibid.*, 17 August, 1941.

43 K. A. P. Viswanathan, Personal interview on 3 September, 1976 at Madras with the author.

44 A Printed Copy of the above charges is with the author.

45 *Kudi Arasu*, 15 July, 1944.

persuaded Anna to bring in a resolution to change the nomenclature of the Justice Party and to transform it into a social organisation. This resolution termed as "Annadurai Resolution" further sought to force the old guards in the party to give up their positions and honours like Sir, Rao Bahadur, Diwan Bahadur etc. As per this resolution the South Indian Liberal Federation which was inaugurated in 1916 was to be renamed as Dravidar Kazhagam. The old guards were not prepared to give up fascinating title namely South Indian Liberal Federation (Justice Party) and they were terribly infuriated. Anna in moving his resolution made a long speech giving the reasons for drafting such a radical resolution.[46] The resolution was passed. The opposition group could not succeed in their endeavour to defeat the resolution. Hence they met separately and decided to retain the old name for themselves.[47]

This Salem Conference is considered as a turning point in the history of the Dravidian Movement. E. V. R. declared that there was not much difference between the new born Dravidar Kazhagam and Justice Party. But the Justicites were not prepared to co-operate with him. Anna alone stood with his young followers behind him. In this connection it is to be pointed out here that those who were with him from the commencement of the Self-Respect Movement left him during this crisis. Though in the earlier occasions they differed from him there was no permanent separation. But this was a final departure.

W. P. A. Soundarapandian of Madurai District who was a close friend of E. V. R. and one who was responsible for conducting the Second Self-Respect Provincial Conference at Virudhunagar could not tolerate this attitude of E. V. R. Hence the arch critics of E. V. R. like K. A. P. Viswanatham,

46 *Ibid.*, 2 September, 1944.

47 *Mail*, 29 August, 1944.

S. Ramanathan, Sami Chidambaranar, V. V. Ramasamy met together and formed a separate 'Self-Respect League'. It was registered under XXI of 1860 Act. The Executive Committee, consisted the following office bearers: W. P. A. Soundarapandian (President), K. A. P. Viswanatham (Vice-President), S. Ramanathan (Secretary), V. V. Ramasamy (Treasurer), Sami Chidambaranar, A. Ponnambalanar of Poovalur, J. S. Kannappar, Vai. Su. Shanmugam, M. S. Sivasamy, A. Venugopal, V. S. S. Mani, P. P Ramasamy, A. P. R. Soundarapandian and T. Avudayappan (Committee Members)[48].

E. V R on the other hand tried to revive the Self-Respect Movement under a slightly different name in 1945. The new 'Self-Respect Association' of E. V. R. differed from the original Self-Respect Movement. Its aim was to publish propaganda pamphlets, leaflets and books similar to those of the 1930s. E. V R planned to train full time propagandists in order to carry the Self-Respect message to the masses. He inaugurated on 10 October, 1945 the Dravidian Freedom Force, under the aegis of the Dravidar Kazhagam. The Force was to be a permanent body consisting of full time workers who would take orders only from the leader of the party. This was started to fight for the liberation of the Dravidian country.[49]

The members of this Force were given black-shirts as their uniform to signify the general 'down trodden condition of the Dravidians in society'. This inauguration of the Dravidian Freedom Force soon came to be known as 'Karun Chattai Padai' (Black Shirt Force). They were generally known as Black-Shirts.

E. V. R. in his statement cleared the doubts and explained that neither this was militant organisation nor an extremist

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48 *Appendix* XIII and XIV.

49 *Kudi Arasu,* 13 October, 1945.

one. The First Provincial Black Shirt Conference was held at Madurai in May 1946. E V. R. in his speech at the conference hinted that he was determined to give a militant character to the Black-Shirt Movement and use it as a weapon to bring about radical change in society. The Conference Pandal was set fire to by some miscreants and the Congress Government in power banned the Black Shirt Movement. The members of the D. K. agitated for the removal of the ban which was removed later on. It created some apprehension among a section of the public.[50]

E. V. R. insisted that everyone should wear a black-shirt. But it was resisted by many of the D. K. including Anna.[51] The wearing of blackshirit was one of the issues that was responsible for a rift in the D. K. But it remained dormant until 1947. The other issues to be pointed out were the independence day issue and collection of purse to poet Bharati Dasan.

E V R. boycotted the Independence Day Celebrations. He refused to recognize the Indian Constitution, which he considered as merely a tool of Brahmin tyranny.[52] But Anna opposed the stand of E. V. R. In a 12 page letter in Dravida Nadu he explained the necessity of celebrating the Independence day by the D. K. members.[53] Anna boycotted the Conference held at Cuddalore on fourteenth October 1947 and also the Conference held at Tuticorin in 1948 E. V R. utilized the later Conference to condemn the 'renegades'. But he attempted a

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50 Tamilnadu Archives, Public, Home, G. O. No 1481 18 June, 1948.

51 T M. Parthasarathi, D M K. Varalaru, p. 43.

52 P. D. Devanandan, The Dravida Kazhagam : A Revolt against Brahminism (Bangalore : Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1960), pp. 10-11.

53 *Dravidanadu*, 1 August, 1947.

compromise by appointing Anna, President of a Conference held later that same year.[54] This was only a temporary adjustment.

The opportunity for the dissidents to depart from the party came in the form E. V. R's marriage. At the age of 72, he married a 28 year old girl who had been an active member of the party. In a statement giving the reasons for his marriage he said that, as he had no confidence in his lieutenants, he was marrying a girl in whom he had full trust and who would lead the party after his death.[55] On the pretext that the marriage was contrary to the avowed social objectives of the Kazhagam, Anna seceded from the party to form the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam.[56]

Even after the exit of the leading young members with Anna, E. V. R. continued to run the party. While the D. M. K. was concentrating on social reform through politics, E. V. R. was cautious in not allowing any any one of his party members to contest any elections. His attitude towards Congress changed after Kamaraj became the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu in 1954. When the D. M. K. was in strong opposition to the Congress, the 'Dravidar Kazhagam' of E V. R. became the staunch supporter of the Congress. E. V. R. supported Congress and its measures only for the sake of Kamaraj whom he called as 'Pacchai Tamilan' ( A True Tamil ) and characterized the D. M. K. people as "Kanneerthuligal" (Tear drops).

In the 1967 General Election the D. M. K. won with a thumping majority and formed the Ministry under the leadership of Anna. Before taking oath as Ministers, Anna and his lieutenants went to Trichy and met E. V. R. They remarked that they would follow the ideals of E. V R. and were dedicating the

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54 T. M. Parthasarathi, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 63–64.

55 P. Spratt, *D. M. K in Power*, p. 38; *Vidudalai* 19 June, 1949.

56 *Dravidanadu*, 23 September, 1949.

Ministry under his feet. This magnanimous attitude of Anna made E. V. R. to support the D. M. K. till his death in 24 December, 1973. After his death "Dravidar Kazhagam" continued to function under the Presidentship of Maniammai, the wife of E. V. R. Thus we find the Self-Respect Movement retaining its original spirit in spite of the Kaleidoscopic changes which took place in its organization during the years 1926 to 1973. We find the same wine in different bottles. The daughter organizations which separated from the original one, are still wedded to the same old principles of social equality and regeneration of the Tamils.

# 6

# Conclusion

From the foregoing analysis of the social reform movements in Tamilnadu, the following broad conclusions may be arrived at :

Social reform movements in Tamilnadu were not isolated incidents, but part of the general reform movements which were going on in the different parts of India, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A bird's eye view of the reform movements in India in general and in Tamilnadu in particular, given at the outset of the thesis clearly brings out this truth.

Of all the social reform movements in Tamilnadu, the only movement which was non-religious and secular in its approach to social problems was the Self-Respect Movement, started by E. V. Ramasami. While all other social reform movements in Tamilnadu were rather lukeworm into translating their ideals into practice Self-Respect Movement was vociferous and even militant in its efforts to achieve social equality in practice.

It was the only Movement which through thick and thin carried on its crusade against caste system relentlessly.

The Self Respect Movement was solely the brain child of E. V. R., who became the grand rebel against the ancient varnashrama system which advocated inherent superiority and inferiority among people. At first he was a full-fledged member of the Indian National Congress because he believed that the Congress was wedded to social reforms as enunciated by Gandhiji's constructive programme. But later on, he discovered that the Congress leaders, especially Brahmins could not come out of their shell of casteism and while paying lip service to Gandhian ideals, practised caste discrimination in actual life. Such caste discrimination practised in the Shermadevi Gurukulam of V. V. S. Iyer instigated his separation from the Congress and founding of a new group called Self-Respect League.

E. V R. could have joined earlier the Justice Party which also stood for social justice. The reason for his refusal to join it then, has been found to be his conviction that the battle for social justice could not be fought well, on the arena of politics. His desire to start a movement purely wedded to social reform was the genesis of the new Self-Respect League.

The growth of the Self-Respect Movement was due to the dynamism and originality of its founding father, E. V. R. The age old dichotemy between the Brahmin and the Non-Brahmin cultures and the humiliations showered on the Sudras and Panchamas by the Brahmins, greatly accelerated his Movement His rationalism though nasueating to the orthodox people had a powerful appeal to the youth of Tamilnadu, who joined in great numbers.

It has been found that the development of the Movement was mostly due to the selfless service of his followers, and his wife Nagammai who saw to it that the team of disciples of E. V. R never lost heart and separated from

the Movement. Unobtrusively and unostentatiously she was acting as the arch inspirer of many a reform activities. Sometimes she herself took active part in them.

The various annual conferences and the resolutions passed therein contributed much to the growth of the Movement. Local Self-Respect Leagues founded all over Tamilnadu became the torch bearers of social reform. Many of them, tried their best to translate their ideals into practice. This added lustre to the Movement and aided its development.

The Justice Party leaders also became sympathisers of the Movement and tried to put its ideals into practice by passing a number of laws intended to promote social equality and justice. While the Self-Respect League fought for social reform through non-political activities, the Justice Party carried its objectives in the political field.

It has been established how the Self-Respect Movement was prospering as long as it confined itself only to the social field and how it underwent a turn began when E. V R. influenced by Russian Communism tried to start a political wing in his Movement to achieve his ideals through politics. Its diversion was further accelerated when its leader joined the Justice Party and became its President. The re-naming of the Justice Party as Dravidar Kazhagam and proclaiming its ideal as attainment of a separate Dravida Nad marked the lowest end of the Movement. That is why the thesis has been confined to the period from 1920 to 1940.

However, the Movement has made a deep dent in the ironframe of the conservative and caste-ridden Tamil society. The monopoly of power and influence enjoyed by the Brahmins was slowly lost due to E. V. R.'s unceasing propaganda against orthodoxy. It awakened the suppressed and oppressed elements of the Tamilnadu society from their deep slumber caused by deep-rooted social and religious superstitions and traditions.

It filled with the sense of Self-Respect and above all Self-Confidence to fight against social injustice perpetrated by the Brahmins of the day. As a token of their sense of Self-Respect they abandoned the habit of addressing the Brahmins by the honorific prefix of 'Sami' which is an epithet adduced to Gods and Angels In fact the habit of Panchamas addressing the non-Brahmin superiors as Sami was also given up gradually because of the propaganda of the Self-Respecters.

The practice of having separate dining places for Brahmins in every hotel or ear-marking separate eating places in public feasts was slowly given up owing to the agitation of the volunteers of the Movement. It was due to their relentless fight that the name-board of the hotels was changed from 'Brahmin's hotel' into mere 'Vegetarian Hotels'. In the same way the name-board contained 'Sudras' in the Railway Canteens were abolished. The system of allotting separate places for Harijan members in the Municipal Councils was also discontinued.

Owing to its influence several people gave up their caste titles and took pride in publishing their names in Kudi Arasu. By 1932 there were 1,50,000 people in the Madras Province who had dropped their caste names and caste marks. The Self-Respecters refrained from going to temples rejected priestly authority during marriage and other ceremonies like the 'shraddha ceremony' in which the Brahmins were fed to propitiate the dead ancestors.

Widow-remarriage and divorce which were a taboo in Hindu Society came to be practiced by the Tamils as a result of this movement. Another beneficiary result of their propaganda was the practice of monogamy in the place of polygamy. They championed the cause of women, denounced child marriages, the dowry system and the devadasi system. They upheld women's right to property and inheritance, their right to divorce, to practise the modern methods of birth control.

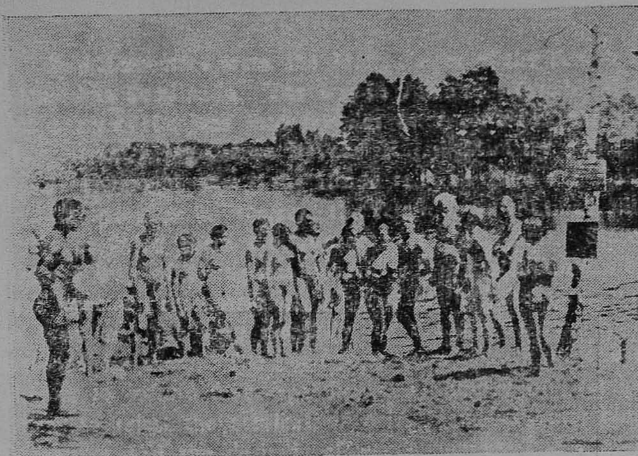
Self-Respecters were the inauguraters of the Temple Entry Movement in Tamilnadu. The way in which they forcibly brought about entry of Harijans into temples later on led to the passing of temple entry legislation by the Rajaji Ministry The Self-Respecters thought that if the Hindu religion gave the Brahmins sacerdotal position in society, the religious institutions like the temples provided them the source of their income. Since the sacerdotal way of living was sanctioned in the Hindu law books as the special prerogative of the Brahmins the propriety of such laws and the very necessity of the Hindu temples were questioned by them. The Self-Respecters's call on the non-Brahmins to refrain from spending any money on worship in temples, to reject the services of priests and to cease building new temples had the desired effect on many. The Movement revived Tamil nationalism and created a love for Tamil language and culture. Inspired by this ideals many clamoured for worship being done in temples through the Tamil language instead of Sanskrit It was through the agitation of the Self-Respecters, the Justice Party gave communal representation to the Non-Brahmins in the Local and State Governments.

The Hindu Religious Endowment Act passed by the Justice Party Government was in fact inspired by the secular ideals of the Movement Before the advent of this movement prestigeous professions like those of the doctors were a monopoly of Brahmins and Keralities who know Sanskrit. But the Justice Party abolished their privilege by scrapping the condition that the Sanskrit knowledge was essential for becoming a doctor.

Besides the negative activities of the Movement we also notice certain positive effects produced by its propaganda. We have seen how its propaganda was bordering on atheism. The way in which the Hindu Gods and Goddesses religious rituals were rediculed in public meetings produced a healthy reaction among the believers in God who in order to safeguard their ideals and practices redoubled their theistic activities. The Saivites held

several conferences to promote Saivism among the people. The Abbots of monasteries woke up from their slumber and allocated huge sums of money for the propagation of religion. Many temples were renovated and the sculptures and paintings which were neglected for a long time were given a new lease of life. The trustees of temples took special care in preserving the temples and performing the relevant ceremonies and festivals. A number of devotional songs and religious books came to be published at cheaper rates so that religious knowledge could reach the masses instead of being confined to the classes. Since because of the prominence given to atheism, the positive side of this movement was not felt outside But most of those belonging to the backward communities, and those who are well educated among them still believe that it all they attained such a high position it was because of the relentless fight made by E. V. R Any government in Tamilnadu could not go against the ideas of E. V. R. with regard to the position of the backward masses.

Thus, by and large the Self Respect Movement had a healthy influence on the Tamil Society and culture. Further its ideals and achievements offer a perennial source for any movement both social and political that may spring up from the Tamil soil for years to come.



Periyar and S. Ramanathan in a Nude pose at a Nudist Society in Germany.



The Place where Vaikom Satyagraha held at Vaikom



Periyar. E. V. R. (centre) at the age of Eleven

# E. V. R. and Madras Presidency Association

Thiru Vi. Kalyanasundaram (Thiru. Vi. Ka.) was responsible for the foundation of Madras Presidency Association. In a meeting held at Gokhale Hall, Madras in September 1917 he stressed the need for the establishment of a separate non-Brahmin Association other than the Justice Party. He emphasised in that meeting that the Justice Party did not reflect the non-Brahmin interests and therefore it could not be considered an organisation of the non-Brahmins. His speech inspired the non-Brahmin leaders in the Congress to start a new organisation of their own. Sabapathi Pillai and A. S. Ramulu who worked in "New India" stressing the need for such an organisation wrote articles in favour of the same in the press.[1]

It was Gopalasamy Mudaliar who made the first attempt to organize such an Association during a meeting held on September 15 in the Gokhale Hall. But that meeting was disrupted by a small group led by O. Kandasami Chettiar.[2] The Chairman P. Kesava Pillai was obliged to call the police to restore order. Next week another meeting under the Chairmanship of Arunagiri Chetty was organised for the same purpose. The efforts of the Justicites to disrupt such meetings failed ultimately. The Congress non-Brahmins were determined, and promptly called for another meeting on September 20, to which only persons with tickets issued by Kesava Pillai and other genuine Congress non-Brahmins would be admitted.[3] This meeting proved to be the inaugural meeting of the Madras Presidency Association, as it came to be called. Its

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1 Mrs. Besant on her return from England in June 1914 acquired an English daily, the old Madras Standard and renamed it New India. The first issue appeared in 14 July, 1914.

2 Eugene F. Irschick, *Op. Cit., p.* 60.

3 *New India*, 22 September, 1917.

chief aim was to place before Montagu, the Secretary of State for India a scheme of reforms designed to give non-Brahmins full communal representation.[4] It was directly opposed to the Justice Party which according to it was unrepresentative of the non-Brahmins in the Presidency.[5] Justicites accused M. P. A. of being the tool of the Madarasi Brahmins. They accused that the Brahmins had set it up purposely to try and reduce the popularity of the Justice Party.[6] The 'Hindu' supported the formation of M P.A. as "not only necessary but urgent" because it was the only way to to combat the Justice Party, which it characterised as being made up of "wire pullers from behind".[7]

M.P.A. leaders ignoring the criticisms of the Justice Party began to build up an organisational structure, a task that was made a good deal, easier by their positions within the Congress. A Central office was established in Madras City with twenty branches elsewhere in the Province. Different claims were made as to its membership, the M.P.A. at first said that it had 2000, but an editorial in the Hindu put the number at 800[8] Leadership for the M.P.A. came from the same socio-economic groups as those of the Justice Party-mostly the well educated, middle-class non-Brahmins. P. Kesava Pillai was elected as President. The following became the Vice-Presidents: Lodd Govindoss, Salla Guruswami Chetti, E.V. Ramasami, Nagai Pakkirisami, Sirkali Sidanbaranatha Mudaliar, Tanjore Srinivasa Pillai and George Joseph. Some of them such as T.V. Gopalasami Mudaliar, Guruswami Naidu, Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu, Sarkarai Chettiar and Tiru. Vi Ka. were called as Ministers of the M.P.A.

M P A.'s plans for the liberation of the country, its efforts at the amelioration of the condition of the masses, removal of un-

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4 *Ibid*.

5 *Ibid*., 10 October, 1917.

6 Eugene F. Irschick, *Op. Cit*., p.61.

7 *Hindu*, 24 December. 1917.

8 *Ibid*., (weekly edition) 14 December, 1917; also *Hindu* 18 December, 1917.

9 Thiru. Vi. Kalyanasundaranar, *Op. Cit*, pp. 260-262.

touchability and prohibition, impressed E.V.R. He attended its inaugural meeting and was in full agreement with its aims, particularly its efforts to secure representation for non-Brahmins in public bodies, which according to him were inspired by a desire for social justice. Thus captivated by its ideals he took increasing interest in the activities of the association, serving as one of its Vice-Presidents and participating in all its deliberations.

The first provincial conference of the above Association was held at Sirkali. District conferences were held at Tanjore, Tiruchi and Madras E V.R. helped the conduct of the second annual conference at Erode in October 1919 and he was also the member of the Reception Committee.[10]

Like the Justice Party, the M.P A. had both an English language newspaper and a Tamil newspaper. C. Karunakara Menon, at one time an active opponent of Mrs. Besant and publisher of Non-Brahmin Letters, devoted his paper, the "Indian Patriot", to M.P.A. interest. The Tamil paper was a new one and it was called Desabaktan ("The Patriot"), and beginning on 7 December 1917 it appeared daily under the vigorous editorship of Thiru. Vi. Ka.[11]

As an active member of this Association, E V. R. became familiar with the programmes and policies of the Indian National Congress. But the M.P.A. existed only for two years, and it also fought for communal representation in which E.V.R. was more interested. The Meston Award, poor financial support, lack of enthusiasm on the part of their leaders and their preoccupation with the activities other than those of the M.P.A. contributed to its downfall. Moreover informal agreement among non-Brahmin leaders was not possible because of their highly independent and individualistic attitudes. P. Kesava Pillai, President of M.P.A. severed his connections with the Congress to join forces with the Justice Party. V.O. Chidambaram Pillai was not very active in the M P.A. owing to his personal commitments and his interest in

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 258–263.

11 Pulavar Arasu, *Thiru.Vi. Kalyanasundaranar*(Biography of Thiru. Vi. Kalyanasundaram Mudaliar, Tirunelveli, 1961), pp. 43-46.

literary pursuits.[12] Thiru. Vi. Ka. was engrossed in consolidating and strengthening the nascent labour movement with which he was associated from its inception in Madras. He resigned his editorship of Desabaktan in July 1920, thus terminating his participation in the activities of the association.[13] Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu another prominent leader was involved in a strike at the Harvey Mills, Madurai and did not again participate in its formal activities. The Harvey Mills strike and the resultant court action consumed most of his time and he could not attend to the activities of M.P.A. Even after his release from there he had no time for M.P.A. activities, for he had to ensure the smooth running of his new Tamil weekly, "Tamil Nadu" and to move from one place to another to propagate the principles of Gandhi's Non-Co-operation Movement.

12 M.P. Sivagnanam, *Kappalottiya Tamilan*, (Madras), p. 50.
13 T.V. Kalyanasundaranar *Op. Cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 258, 260, 87.

APPENDIX II

# Vaikom Satyagraha and E. V. R.

The 'Vaikom Satyagraha' provided E. V. R. with the opportunity to demonstrate his capacity to fight for social justice on behalf of the untouchables in Kerala. For his role in it he was lionized as 'Vaikom Veerar' (Vaikom Hero) by the Tamil-speaking population of the Madras Presidency.[1] The campaign was launched against the inhuman restrictions imposed on the so-called untouchables in the former princely state of Travancore.

People belonging to the Scheduled Castes were not allowed to walk in the streets of Vaikom a small town in that state. This ban was an age old practice and custom of that place. The spirit of Self-Respect of the Scheduled Caste people living there was aroused in due course. So they aspired for the achievement of their right to walk along the streets. The Congress leaders of Travancore State who sympathised with the rights of the untouchables thought of starting Satyagraha to achieve the same.

Accordingly the Satyagraha was started on .. The agitation stemmed from an incident that took place between some Brahmins and Madhavan, a lawyer who belonged to a lower social status, namely the Ezhava Community. Madhavan came to attend the court in connection with a client's case. The court was located inside the compound of the Maharaja's palace. Within the same compound at that time a religious function in honour of the Maharaja's birth-day was in progress. Therefore the orthodox Brahmins, fearing pollution even from the mere approach of a low caste Hindu forbade his entry. This incident was made into an issue by the local leaders of the Ezhava community with the support of T.K. Madhavan, a fellow Ezhava and the Editor of Deshabhimani, George Joseph, a prominent Kerala Congress leader and K. P. Kesava Menon, the Editor of Mathrubhumi.

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1 K.M. Balasubramaniam, *Op. cit.*, p. 21. *The Modern Rationalist*, Vol. IV, (Madras, 1975), P. 9.

When a decision to take out a procession of untouchables on a prohibited road was taken it was conveyed to Gandhiji on 12 march 1924.[2] Having attained Gandhiji's approval the leaders launched the Satyagraha on 31 March. George Joseph was in charge of the campaign. But even before the campaign was properly set on its track, the leader found himself behind the bars along with eighteen other top men of the Kerala Congress. The movement not yet in form had almost been crippled. The imprisoned leaders thus upset were seriously thinking of alternative member leading the campaign and saving it from the miserable fate that had befallen it. Periyar E.V.R. became their unanimous choice. So a last-minute letter of fervent request signed by Neelakanda Namboodri and George Joseph was sent from the prison cell calling E.V.R. to assume leadership of agitation.[3]

> "We had already started a mission that is too great. As the consequence, governmental opposition too has been let loose. We had never imagined that we would be caught and put behind the bars so soon. Only if you come here to Vaikom and assume the leadership of the Satyagraha and prolong the struggle, our honour and the honour of our Kerala will be left unscathed. There is no time to think over deeply and delay".

The above letter was sent through a courier secretly to E.V.R.[4]

The request was just another opportunity for E.V.R. to devote himself to the cause which was dearest to him namely the cause of social justice. And, so, after attending the political conference held at Kulithalai, though badly indisposed at the time he prepared himself for the great occasion and left for Vaikom. The news of the arrival of E.V.R. at Vaikom and his participation in the Satyagraha reached the ears of the Maharaja of Travancore.

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2 Director, Publications Division, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XXIII, (Delhi, 1967), p. 272.

3 Sami Chidambaranar, *Vaikom Hero*, *The Modern Rationalist*, Vol. IV, No. 8, (Madras, 1975), p. 9; Periyar E.V. Ramasami, *Tintamayai Olittatu Yar*, p. 22

4 Sami Chidambaranar, *Ibid*., p. 9.

He was shocked at E.V.R.'s polemical speeches particularly directed against the Brahmins and feared that they would lead to communal disharmony. E.V.R. and Kovai (Coimbatore) Ayyamuthu who accompained him offered Satyagraha and courted arrest. The news of his arrest brought on the scene his wife Nagammai and S. Ramanathan, who together in their own way continued the agitation.

After a lapse of one month on his release from Arivikkuthu Jail a warrent was served on him to leave the state immediately. E.V.R. violated that order too. So he was arrested again. He was awarded six months rigorous imprisonment and was put in the Travandrum Central Jail but he was released two months earlier under amnesty due to the sudden death of the Maharaja.[5]

Finally the Satyagraha struggle had won. It continued upto October 1927 and the roads were thrown open by the Travancore ruler to the untouchables.[6] The first struggle to wipe out untouchability that succeeded in the whole of India was this Vaikom Satyagraha. It was only an after effect of this Satyagraha, that there arose the struggle for temple entry and all the doors of the Hindu temples in the State of Travancore were declared open for the Scheduled Caste people. Vaikom was in travail to yield the babe of Temple Entry in 1936.

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5 An Admirer, *op. Cit.*, pp. 21, 23; K. M. Balasubramaniam, *Op. Cit.* pp. 21, 22; Periyar E V. Ramasami, *Tintamaiyai Olittatu Yar*, pp. 25 and 28–29; *Navasakthi*, 12 September, 1924.

6 Director, Publications Division, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XXXV, (New Delhi, 1969), p. 116.

# Resolutions Passed at the Tirunelveli District Self-Respect Conference under the Presidentship of Sriman Naicker

1 This Conference expresses its condolence on the passing away of Sir. T. Sadasiva Iyer, former Judge, Chairman—Hindu Religious Endowment Board and a great man who worked for the welfare of the people.

2 (a) To call the people belonging to a particular community among the so-called Hindus as 'Sudra' is very cruel and atrocious. Hence this Conference decides that nobody under any circumstances should use that word.

(b) It is also decided that the word 'Sudra' should not find place in any of our law books and other official records. In addition, all laws that prescribe one type of justice to the 'Sudras' and another type of justice to the 'parpanar' i. e. 'Brahmins' should be changed.

(c) This Conference expresses its regret for the usage of the word 'Sudra' adopted by the Prime Minister of the Government of Madras recently when he was dealing with a documentary proof in the floor of the legislature. It also requests that the same must be changed immediately.

3 The practice of dividing the Dining Rooms meant for the use of the public belonging to the Hindu fold in the Railway Stations into two as "Brahmins" and "Non-Brahmins" is a grave disrespect for the Self-Respect of the Non-Brahmin public. Hence this Conference appeals to the Railway authorities to do away with such divisions.

It also appeals to the Railway authorities to do away with the practice of appointing the Brahmins only as cooks in the Dining Rooms set up and run by the railways.

4 The present practice of the Municipal Chairman in issuing licence for running hotels and coffee houses within their respective municipal limits is to discriminate between the Brahmins and the Non-Brahmins and to allot separate places for them. This Conference wants that this practice of discrimination must not be followed hereafter and this Conference requests the Municipal Chairman of every Municipality should correct the discriminatory entry in the licenses that had already been issued.

5 To refer to "Varnasrama" is unbecoming of the decency of the human society in general. Particularly this practice is a device used for dividing and isolating the Tamils and committing evil over them. Hence this Conference decides we must not accept that in any of its meanings and that the Manu Dharma Sashtra and other similar codes which are based on Varnasrama Dharma, should be done away with lock, stock and barrel.

6 This Conference does not approve the act of Mahatma Gandhi during his tour in the South, namely, elucidating of Varnasrama Dharma among the Tamilian masses. It also condemns very strongly the usage of the term 'Sudra' by Gandhi.

7 This Conference decides that the public places pertaining to the Hindu society like temples, temple tanks, choultries, etc., should at least be thrown open to those who claim to belong to the Hindu religion with equal right.

8 This Conference decides that there is no need for an intermediary between the worshipper and the God and that there is right for everybody to worship straight away and perform the Pujas. Hence it requests that everybody should adapt this practice immediately.

9 There is a G. O. which forbids all the higher officials of the Government Departments from indulging in recommending to their subordinate officers the names of candidates for appointment in Government services. Notwithstanding this G. O., Sir. C.P. Ramaswami Iyer, the Chief of the Justice Department had sent a letter to a British Judge belonging to the High Court of Madras recommending, a Brahmin candidate for

appointment as Munsiff. This Conference condemns this act and also requests the Non–Brahmin members of the Madras Provincial Legislature to take follow up actions in this regard.

10 In the Hindu families, there are widows who are not for remarriage after the demise of their husbands. To such widows the right to inherit the properties that belonged to their husbands must be bestowed.

11 There must be parity among the sons and daughters in the matter of inheritance of the family properties in Hindu families.

12 This Conference appeals that Commend Respresentation must be awarded to all the communities and all the religious groups till the caste and religious differences prevail in this country.

13 This Conference requests the Non-Brahmin officers who head the Government Departments to see that 90 per cent of the vacancies in their Departments should be filled up by Non-Brahmins.

14 Since in the Education Department, majority of the teachers as well as the officers are Brahmins, there are great hurdles in the educational development of the Non-Brahmin students. To remove such hurdles 90 per cent of the officers in the Education Department should be recruited from Non-Brahmin Communities. In the Teachers' Training Schools too 90 per cent of the enrolment should compulsorily be from the Non-Brahmin Communities. This Conference requests to this effect all the officers of the respective Departments.

15 This Conference appeals that Self-Respect Associations must be established in every Taluk and big villages of this District.

16 This Conference appeals that everybody must subscribe and patronize the papers and magazines like 'Justice', 'Dravidan', 'Kudi Arasu', 'Kumaran', etc,. which inculcate Self-Respect feelings openly and directly arising the Non-Brahmin masses.

17 This Conference Vehemently condemns the practice of reserving separate wards for Brahmin patients in the Government Hospitals.

18 This Conference acclaims the services of Thiru E. V. Ramasami Naicker the 'Vaikom Hero', who endeavours unceasingly for uplift of the Non-Brahmin Communities by way of opening their eyes towards the attainment of Self-Respect and also offers its thanks to him.

19 In the recently held elections for the Madras Corporation, all the machinations conducted by the Brahmins to see that no Non-Brahmins becomes the Chairman, are fully understood by the Non-Brahmin masses. Hence this Conference appeals to one and all of the Non-Brahmin public to cast their votes in the elections to which everybody, only to the Non-Brahmin candidates and elect them.

20 The practice of dedicating girls to the Hindu temples in the name of God and religion and thus making them prostitutes is an utter dishonour and disrespect for the Hindu Society. Hence the Conference decides that such a practice should be stopped. In this connection this Conference condemns strongly the counter-propaganda conducted by Dr. Mrs. Muthulakshmi Reddy.

21 This Conference appeals to the Government to start more and more schools and Siddha Dispensaries in the villages and to cancel the collection of school fees from the children belonging to the Adi-Dravida Community.

22 In the arrangement for writing textbooks of Science by the Government of Madras, the technical terms so far coined are in the form of Sanskrit. Thus, this Conference condemns and recommends to the Education Minister of the Government of Madras that all the scientific technical terms should be coined in pure Tamil and alien language terms can be coined and used only in place where pure Tamil terms can't be coined.

23 This Conference decides that those of the Non-Brahmin Communities who have got belief in conducting rituals and ceremonies should conduct the rituals in Tamil language only and that too by elderly gentlemen who never accept the theory of supremacy based on birth.

24 This Conference appeals to one and all patronize Khadder for the sake of upkeeping the Self-Respect of the nation and the economy also.

25 This Conference appeals that every Non-Brahmin should be made to see that in all the departments of our economy, the money belonging to the Non-Brahmins should reach only the Non-Brahmin hands and none other.

26 It is announced that this Conference is ready to extend all support for the Satyagraha that is to be conducted in Tamilnadu for upkeeping Self-Respect.

27 This Conference expresses its joy over the victory achieved in the struggle for getting the right of entry into the street inhabited by the Brahmin localities of Kalpathi where the downtrodden people had been forbidden for a very long time. This is a symbol of the success for the Self Respect Movement too.

28 This Conference is immensely pleased to see that the Trustees of the Pachaiappa's College, Madras have accepted Adi-Dravidas as Hindus and have admitted them into their educational institutions. This Conference condemns the Brahmin member who stood against this more namely, Venkatesha Sashtrulu. Further it appeals to the public not to nominate as trustees anybody who belong to this group. Also, it is further requested by this Conference that even students from the Christian and Mohammedan Communities should be admitted with a mind to social unity and social justice.

29 This Conference appeals to the owners of the Manali Hostel, Madras, to allot more seats for those who hail from Non-Brahmin Communities.

30 This Conference appeals to the Thanjavur District Board to reserve a portion of the grant that is now being alloted to the Sanskrit College at Thiruvaiyaru and to utilise the same for augmenting the general educational facilities for the Adi-Dravidas.

31 This Conference is of the opinion that our Non-Brahmins should not associate themselves with the political groups that plan to boycott the Royal Commission.

32 The Non-Brahmin Members of the legislature are requested to take very effort to follow up these resolutions and to do the needful for the implementation of them by enacting proper legislations.

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*Kudi Arasu*, dated 11 December, 1927.

APPENDIX IV

# Principles of the Self-Respect Movement

The various resolutions passed in the Conferences, the various struggles undertaken time to time, the various speeches delivered by and various writing written by the stalwarts of the Movement shed ample light for anybody to understand clearly the principles. Yet, mere derivation, assumption and even conjecture are not proper alternatives to spelt-out proclamations in unequivocal terms. Thus, to be authentic beyond doubt, we must get the codified principles of the Movement from the authoritative sources. The earlier the source the better for the researcher because later day pronouncements and elucidations do not reflect the original mind and heart of any movement. Instead, they portray only a corrupted corroded and corrugated version of the original to suit the times and places then and there. The earliest one of such proclamations is found in the columns of Kudi Arasu.

This proclamation runs for four full pages (from 11 to 14 of that issue) under the title, "The principles of the Self-Respect Movement". It is a 41 point charter divided into 10 different heads. It is not known which was adopted by E.V.R. as the model for this proclamation. Yet, one is bound to appreciate the fields which are covered by the probing and prodding intellect of the originators. The vastness of the sweep and the keenness evinced for practical application are vouching the ambitious aspiration as well as the awareness of the work-a-day difficulties on the part of the Self-Respect codifiers. Now, let us see the text of the proclamation.

## 1. SOCIOLOGY

1 Abolition of the priest-oriented rituals which are beyond the comprehension of the bride and the bride-groom during the celebration of marriages.

2 Stopping the practice of observing 'Dhidhi' (death anniversary) to propitiate the dead since this is a more guise for filling the bellies of the Brahmin priests.

3 To scrap the essentiality of the services of the Brahmin priest in the conduct of various rituals like funeral, riddance of pollution, child birth, schooling, nuptial, etc.

4 To do away with the principle of providing meals exclusively for Brahmins in choultries and rest-houses.

5 To wipe out the very thought that God will grant entry into Heaven only if one offer donations to the Brahmins.

6 To wipe out the foolish thought that the effects of the evil-deeds done by one's father can be nullified by the donations his son extend to the Brahmins.

7 To wipe out the very thought that one human being can offer another human being Heaven and that one can beget children by employing magical spells or by adopting other sorts of invocation methods and thus incurring heavy expenditures.

8 To put an end to the practice of regarding men as high and low on the basis of their birth.

9 To ban in all aspects the use of the word 'Sudra' since the meaning of that word is 'son of a prostitute'.

10 To stop the practice of giving away girls of very tender age in marriage to old men.

11 To do away with the practice of prohibiting fellow human beings from entering and walking along streets where even dogs donkeys, pigs, etc. are allowed to roam.

12 To eradicate fully the unjust practice of one man under compulsion calling another by employing the term 'Sami' (Godly Sir)

## 2 POLITICS

1 To unmask the fraudulant stand of the patriots who pronounce that Self-Respect can be achieved only after the achievement of "Swarajya" i. e. Independence.

2 To boycott any group or any individual who is against the priciple of communal representation.

3 To expose the prevarication of the 'Indian National Congress' which has been for long telling the people that it was a mere political organisation.

## 3. TEMPLE-CRAFT

1 To stop the practice of wasteful expenditure by way of unnecessarily building temples, conducting functions like comsecration and renovation to temples and arranging for religious festivals.

2 To scrap the practice of prohibiting entry into the temples by a few who too are claiming to be Hindus.

3 To eradicate the practice of offering girls to temple for the purpose of temple services who are branded by tying a distinctive ornament (pottu) and who are made to dance inside the precincts of the temple.

4 To do away with the irrational practice that only those who are born in a particular community are entitled to officiate pujas in the temple.

5 The practice of offering four annas or two annas to the Brahmin priest for performing Archanas in the temples will end in ourselves accepting the assumption that God is ignorant of all other languages except Sanskrit and that God cannot identify us unless we are introduced to him by a Brahmin priest. Hence, this irrational practice must be rooted out.

6 To eliminate the practice of fixing priority among the recipients of 'Prasadam' (holy articles offered by the priest to devotees after the performance of worship) based on the criteria of birth, wealth and official position.

## 4. JOURNALISM

1 To boycott all sorts of papers that are run by the Brahmins in whichever name they may appear in the name of the nation, the Swarajya (Independence) or the people.

2 To boycott all sorts of papers that are run by the Non-Brahmins but are supporting the tyranny of the Brahmins and are against the Self-Respect Movement.

## 5 REPRESENTATIVISM

1 To stop the practice of non-Brahmins electing Brahmins and their representatives or Presidents in Union Boards, Municipalities, Taluk Boards, Assembly, etc. Since this tantamounts to rats electing cats as their representatives.

2 To arrest the trend of effecting franchise on the grounds of mercy, compassion, influence or money due to the ignorance of the rareness and greatness of voting.

## 6 VEDIC-SASTRIC-PURANAISMS

1 To publicise the fact that the four vedas which are said to have been composed in the Sanskrit language, not belong to the Tamilian people.

2 To burn the Hindu Sastras like Manusuriti which play a prominent role in enjoining justice based on caste by enforcing various caste divisions among the people, in providing a new lease of life to Brahminism and improving the same and in pressing us down the life of slavery continuously.

3 To turn away the people from blindly believing in Puranas which are mere bundles of slanderous bluffs, which are the creations of poets completely incongruous with the practical experience of life and the intellectual inforence, !and which exaggerate sky-high the glorious of God and the distinctive characters and greatness of so many holy places and their bathing ghats, with an eye on the exploitation of money.

## 7 COMMERCE

1 To prevent our people (non-Brahmins) from eating in the commercially run eating places which are managed by the Brahmins where different treatment is meted out to different caste divisions.

## 8 PRECEPTORHOOD

1 To checkmate the underhand design of the Brahmins to brand a man as Jagat guru i. e. Universal Preceptor. That man after all is a preceptor in a tiny peninsula in the world, that too in the southern region of that peninsula and is the preceptor of a particular religion, and that too for a particular caste wherein

too the divisions like Iyengar, Sastri, Sarma, etc. are excepted and meant for the Samartha sect of Brahmins only.

2 To stop the practice of offering money and things to a Brahmin and of worshipping him as his family preceptor—that Brahmin who does not know what religion is, who is employed in some office, who can't stick on to religious teaching for mitigating his own hardships and who visits every year just to collect his annual levy.

3 To protest against the practice of calling ordinary people who bear the semblance of human beings as religious preceptors—those people who, forgetting utterly the aims for which our ancestors established holy institutions, namely betterment of religion, adorn themselves with gold ornaments and silk garments, consume concentrated milk and sleep on velvety matresses—thus enjoying the sensual pleasure of this world, and spend the surplus money on concubines, drink, sex and inciting quarrels.

4 To eliminate the practice of calling 'priest' the group of people who are ungenous in stoutly advocating the welfare of their own kith and kin without minding how the other sections of the society get ruined because of their prosperity.

5 To stop the practice of worshipping those people who do not know what religious piety is, who are too young and boyish to get married, who are inflicted with major diseases, who are immoral and who are always after pelf, for the sole reason that they are born Brahmins.

## 9 JUDICIARY

1 To annihilate jealousy, rancour and antipathy that creap in among our people day by day.

2 To eschew the practice of rushing to the courts whenever any conflict arises among the members of a family or community or the people of a village.

3 To abstain from engaging Brahmin lawyers when it is considered that there is no alternative except to approach the court of law.

## 10 GODHOOD

1 To scrap the foolish belief that whatever sins and dishonest acts a man would have committed, he can earn the indulgence of God by merely building a temple or bathing in a temple ghat or offering money to Brahmins.

2 To reveal that god has nothing to do with the expectation of couples for begetting children after the religious prescriptions of both the Vaishnavite and Saivite priests the former misleading that only those couples who read the Ramayana and conduct Rama's coronation function; the better misleading that even those couples who happen to listen the recitation of Periapuranam, are sure to beget children. The fact is that even after reading the Ramayana a number of times and conduction of the religious ceremony of sita's Marriage, there are many couples who are barren. Similarly, the advice of the Saivite priests too ends in sheer waste of money.

3 To eradicate the blind belief that God is sure to offer Heaven to any dishonest person who pay the Brahmin and conduct through him ritual celebrations in temples and that the same God is sure to condemn even honest man who does not do so.

4 To free the human society from the blind belief that God feels satisfied with sinful persons after accepting the latter's tonsorial offer shaven hair from his head.

Source: *Kudi Arasu*, 3 June, 1928

# Draft Constitution of the Self Respect League

## 1 OBJECT

The object of the Self-Respect League is social reconstruction so as to secure Liberty, Equality and Justice for the individual.

## 2 MEMBERSHIP

Every person (i) who has attained the age of 18; (ii) who does not hold or exercise religious social or political privileges attached to birth; (iii) who is not a priest nor is born in a priestly community may be admitted to membership of the League. But it is open to the Central Council of the League, at its discretion, to refuse admission to any person or to expel any person already admitted to membership.

## 3 SUBSCRIPTION

Every member shall remit in advance to the treasurer of the Central Council an annual subscription of four annas. The year of membership is reckoned from 1 January to 31 December. There shall be no reduction in the subscription to be paid by members joining in the middle of the year. No member whose subscription to the Central Council is in arrears shall be entitled to participate in the activities of the League or any of its constituent bodies.

## 4 CONTRIBUTION

Every union of the League shall levy a contribution from members attached to it on the basis of income. A member who is in arrears with his union in the payment of contribution levied on him shall not be entitled to participate in any of the activities or privileges of the union.

### 5 DONATION

All donations to the League are payable to the trustee of the Central Council. The trustees shall invest or otherwise dispose of such donations at the direction of the Central Council.

### 6 CONSTITUENT BODIES

Thh League shall consist of *(i)* The Conference *(ii)* The Central Council *(iii)* The unions and *(iv)* The Executive Committees.

### 7 AFFILIATED BODIES

Any local or Communal organisation which accepts and strives for the objects of the League may be affiliated to the League at the discretion of and under conditions framed by the Central Council.

### 8 CONFERENCE

The Conference of the League shall be convened by the Central Council whether on its own initiative or on a requisition from a majority of the Executive Committees. The venue and date of the Conference shall be fixed by the Central Council. Each union has the right to be represented at the Conference by delegates in proportion the numbers on its rolls. The proportion of the members of delegates to the nember of members shall be determined by the Central Council. Members of the Central Council and of the Executive Committees shall be ex officio delegates to the Conference. Every Affiliated Body shall be represented at the Conference by such number of delegates as shall be fixed by the Central Council. Each organisation retains its maximum voting strength in spite of the number of delegates actually present. Delegates from organisations not in good standing with the Central Council will not be entitled to participate in the Conference. Decisions of the Conference shall be binding on all the constituent as well as the affiliated bodies.

### 9 THE CENTRAL COUNCIL

The Central Council shall be elected by the Conference of the League and shall hold office at the pleasure of the Conference. During the period between sessions of the Conference the Central

Council shall serve as the supreme executive of the League and shall carry out measures calculated to further the policy and programme laid down by the Conference from time to time. The Central Council shall consist of 15 or more members elected at a sessions of the Conference. The Central Council shall elect from among its members the following office bearers:

(i) A President; (ii) Two Vice-Presidents; (iii) A Treasurer; (iv) A Secretary and (v) Two Trustees.

The Central Council shall have the right to purchase hold and dispose of property on behalf of the League. The Central Council may frame rules to supplement this Constitution. The president of the Central Council shall preside at the session of the Conference of the Leagues.

### 10 UNIONS

Unions are voluntary Associations of the members of the League who agree on the joint prosecution of any programme calculated to further the object of the League and not inconsistant with the policy of programme laid down by the Conference of the League and carried out by the Central Council. The unions shall frame their own bye-laws subject to the approval of the Central Council. The activities of the unions are liable to the supervision and control of the Central Council.

### 11 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES

Every union shall elect from among its members an Executive Committee which shall regulate admission to the union and shall generally be in charge of its affairs. The names of members to the Executive committee shall be in proportion to the number of members on the rolls of the union in the ratio which shall be fixed by the Central Council.

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Source: *Revolt*, 30 January, 1929.

# The Erode Programme

1 The attainment of Complete independence from the British and other forms of Capitalistic Governments.

2 The Cancellation of all national debts.

3 Public ownership of Railways, Banks, shipping and other transport services and water and lands etc.

4 Public ownership without compensation of all agricultural lands, forests and lands etc.

5 Cancellation of all private debts and others obligations incurred by the workers and peasants.

6 Change of all Native States into one Common Indian Federation under the rule of the workers and peasants of India.

7 Improving the life of the workers and peasants of the land by securing for them more than seven hours labour, increased wages, state aid for their unemployed, health resort, free libraries and other cultural facilities.

8 These shall form the main ideal of the Self-Respect Party.

## SELF-RESPECT LEAGUE : SAMADHARMA PARTY OF SOUTH INDIA : PROPOSALS PREAMBLE

Whereas, the Self-Respect Party, during the past eight years has very largely succeeded in rousing the attention of the pass of people to the enormity of their superstitious habits, customs and practices of their religion and caste and of their degraded economic conditions of life.

Whereas, it is becoming increasingly evident that such irrational religious and caste habits and customs and their low economic conditions of life cannot be done away with, except through the state action and

Whereas, it is further evident that the various political, social and religious bodies and institutions are even more determined to hold the masses in social, religious and economic bondage and degradation, through their political organisation all over the country, and

Whereas, the safeguards adopted by the Round Table Conference for the perpetuation of pernicious religious practices of in human cast distinctions are inimical to and destructive of all rational life of the masses.

## OBJECTS

It is hereby proposed to form from the body of Self-Respecter, a political party called the Samadharma Party of South India, to carry out the following main objects, namely,

i) To obtain by constitutional means and methods, the repeal of public utilities, for all harmful religious and caste practices and habits, and thereby free the masses from their degrading religious and caste superstitions and habits and improve their economic life.

ii) To obtain the adoption of adult suffrage for election of members to all Government, Legislative and Municipal bodies, Local, Provincial and Central.

iii) To obtain security of service and minimum wage, to all workers in public and private utility services, such as factories, workshops, railways, shipping, transport, post and telegraph etc.

iv) To get for the landless workers and agricultural labourers working in cultivable lands, estates and water, a resonable share in the produce of such lands, estates and water.

v) To obtain state sanction for utilising temple, church, mosque and religious funds and incomes, for the education, both literary and vocational, for sanitation and housing of the mass population in the country, and for the maintenance of destitute children and orphans.

vi) To obtain the removal of all caste, distinctions among all castes, sects and classes of the Indian Community, by remo-

ving all caste titles, from all public records and making such retention of caste titles as a disability to hold any kind of public service.

vii) To secure through state action, municipalization of housing, transport, milk and medical service and establishment of nurseries in Municipalities, Taluk and District Boards and Village Unions.

viii) To set up party candidates to the Legislative Councils, Taluk, District and Village Boards and Unions and Panchayats, to secure the aforesaid objects of the party.

ix) Party candidates pledged to these various objects of the party will be elected for the various Legislative Councils, Taluk and District Boards Village Unions etc.

(x) These various measures, acts and reforms shall be obtained through all constitutional means and methods such as Council entry and propaganda by means of lectures, discussion and discourses as well as through the press. Rules and regulations for party funds and organizations, etc. will be made by the provisional committee of the Party called for the purpose.

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Kudi Arasu, 1 January, 1933 (Translation E. Sa. Viswanathan, Op. Cit., pp. 404-406).

# Socialist Propaganda

The following is the statement filed on 12-1-1934 before the collector of Coimbatore Mr. G.W. Wells, I. C S. by Comrade E.V. Ramasami on the eve of the first hearing of the case registered against him under section 124-A of the Indian Penal Code for alleged Communist propaganda and sedition.

> There is no basis for this case which has now been registered against me.
>
> I have now read and reread a number of times the leader of KUDI ARASU dated 29-10-1933 on which the case has been based. I agree that that leader was written by me.
>
> If charges for sedition are framed for any of the sentences on points written in that leader then it is to be concluded that there is liberty for nobody either to study the method, etc. of the present-day governmental functioning and divulge the flaws that exist or to make arrangements for the redressal of hardships liable to be caused by those flaws. When I think over to find out the reason for registering such a baseless case against me, I have to arrive at the conclusion that this case is nothing but a contrivance concocted either by the capitalist class or religious traditionalists with the aim of doing away with the socialist propaganda conducted by me. There is no basis for the alleged offence either in the subject matter or in the written words or even in the motive of that leader.
>
> What are the points that have been enunciated and elucidated in that leading article? The important among them are the following: the fees collected by the Education

Department are excessive; the expenditure one has to incur on the education of his children is exorbitant; but the result is not commensurate with the expenditure, there is no provision for extending educational facilities to the poorer sections of the society; hence the poor sections of the public must be very cautious in not being carried away by the words of the rich people, bureaucrats and those who are in power and in exercising their franchise in a responsible manner.

I have been engaging myself for the past seven or eight years in socialist propaganda under the auspices of the Self-Respect Movement. The outstanding principle of that propaganda is that all people should lead a life of equality both in the social and the economic aspects.

The underlying philosophy of that principle is that all the people of the land should be facilitated to consume and enjoy the end-products produced in that country and that each and every citizen of the country must contribute his mite according to his ability in the endeavours needed for that production.

Neither constraint nor violence nor even ill-will has any place in the aim of that Movement, in its programme of action, in its propaganda or in the columns of KUDI ARASU, its official organ. Personally, I too am not interested in seeing that these traits find place in the public life of our country in one form or the other.

If at all any evidence is needed, I can cite ample evidences. For example, for so many years, the special Branch of the Police Department is in possession of almost all of my speeches taken down by its short-hand reporters. In addition to this, the government has been scrutinising the articles that have been appearing in KUDI ARASU for the past ten years. After all these manipulation, the government never instituted any case against me similar to the present one. Then what more evidence is needed?

It is not a wonder that the government is endeavouring its level best to see that I am suppressed somehow or other.

This is so because while the government is capitalistic in its outlook, the nature of my propaganda is socialistic. Also there is nothing to be wondered of the fact that both the rich people and people who lead a luxurious life simi-liar to capitalists have no other go except to support the government covertly and overtly in implementing this measure. This is so because the former i.e. rich people are sharing the positions of governmental power and resultantly are enjoying all the pleasures of life. The latter too are receipient of luxuries due to their religious, communal and educational priorities and privileges.

A few may not feel pleasant and be a willing party for effecting a revolutionary change in the social and economic set-up of our society which has been perpetuated and stabilised on the assumption that this is the will of God and this is quite natural. Though in vogue for many centuries, I am cock-sure that unless the social and economic set ups are thoroughly changed there is no possibility for the removal of very many ills and grievances that eat away the life of our people and there is no way for a contented and convenient life.

To wish for such a change and to achieve the same under-taking propaganda work without any elements of violence, constraint or ill-will are in no way a crime.

For the spread of an effective propaganda for any principle, it is unavoidable for those who are believers of that princi-ple to get oppressed by those who want to obstruct that principle. This does not mean that the believers should voluntarily step forward and court hardships for themselves. Yet, no believer should for sake a golden opportunity that comes as a windfall across him. The motive behind the registration of this case is to put an end to this propaganda. Hence they have got no other go except to imagine that there is prejudice, ill-will and violence in my article some-how or other. If I happen to be convicted on the basis of these imaginations, then there is the danger of myself being misunderstood by those who have got faith and good will upon me in general and by my colleagues in particular.

Hence I feel it is my duty to submit this statement by way of refuting such imaginary accusations and elucidating the truth.

Since there is every possibility of public attention being attracted more and more towards me and my principles and resultantly added up patronage from the people, which may in strengthening my struggle, I have decided to confine myself with the submission of this statment. I am not going to contest the case and I welcome very happily the conviction and penalty that is due to me.

Whatever may be the outcome whether the government furnishes me or rejects this case with an eye on justice and law, on the ground that the complaint against me lacks any foundation I am much pleased for the opportunity provided for me for guiding my comrade in welcoming such oppressional measures taken against us.

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*Puratchi*, dated 2 January, 1934.

APPENDIX VIII

# Programme of Action

1 The pay scales of the Government service jobs are so exorbitant as to spoil the scrupulous purity of our people, as to breed avarice and greed and as to be of highly unbearable to the economic position of the country. Hence these pay scales must be reduced and refixed in such a way as to meet only the essential needs of life for the officers and as not to be of lavish nature to save and multiply the savings.

2 Those factories and industries which produce things that are essential for the needs, comforts and benevolance of the people as well as the transport systems must be owned and run by the government itself.

3 There must not be any intermediaries like the money-lenders and brokers in between the agriculturists who are the producers of food-grains and the public who consume the same. For this, co-operative institutions should be established which would eliminate the hardships of the farmers and loss incurred by the buyers.

4 The loans taken by poor agriculturists should be written off somehow or other. Also, arrangements must be made to see that they do not once again fall victims to this practice.

5 Universal compulsory education to an optimum level within a time limit should be implemented. The evil of drink should be eradicated at least to an extent. Government jobs should be to a certain extent equally distributed among people who belong to various castes and religions. For all these, arrangements must be made immediately and there must also be established proper machinery to see that these measures are implemented sincerely and to suggest proper guidelines in this connection.

6 All the religions should be made to be the personal consideration of the individual mind and to be the separate establishment of the particular denominations. Also, there must not be any link or command between various religions and politics and governmental administration. There must be strict orders to ban any privilege and distinction high or low on the basis of caste or religion. No patronage should be offered to them from governmental sources and no expenditure incurred.

7 As far as possible there must not be any tax burden on those who have only a fixed monthly income or who directly look after their own agricultural works. For those who have income more than the optimum amount needed for a decent living and those land-owners who enjoy the fruits of farming done not directly by them but through hands employed for that purpose, the land revenue rates must be restructured similar to the income tax system.

8 More power should be deputed to the local bodies, municipalities and co-operative institutions and thus they must be entrusted with the implementation and administration of the programmes mentioned above. These bodies must be put under the direct control of paid officials of proper responsibility and trustworthiness.

9 Civil litigations and legal disputes must be minimised and Death Duty must be newly imposed.

10 To implement the above programmes we must draft Bills on our own accord. Whichever programmes liable to be brought into force through the legislature must be processed through them and as far the rest we must start agitations to get the power needed for their implementation.

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(Programme for Action sent to the Conference of S.I.L.F. held at Madras on 29 and 30 September 1934. PAHUTHARIVU, dated 23.9.1934).

APPENDIX IX

# E.V.R.'s Programme of work Discussed at the executive Committee of the Justice Party

## *Economic*

To free the agriculturist from the troubles of indebtedness and to save them from falling victims of indebtedness again and to forbade the money-lenders from usurping the lands belonging to the borrowers, for all these purposes; all the possible measures must be taken in the field of legislation as well as other fields.

Arrangement for establishing a wide-spread network of land mortgage banks and co-operative credit societies for the purpose of saving the agriculturists from the fatal grip of the serious money-lenders. Establishment of land mortgage banks throughout the length and breadth of the Presidency on sound basis. They must be administered by the Government directly.

To minimise the number of cases arising out of land ownership, the government should have in its possession valid sources indicating the ownership of every land in the most clear and unambiguous terms. In addition to this, the government must do away with the practice of contesting such cases on the ground that the land ownership had been transferred with alterior motives and on benami transaction. Courts must be provided with powers to reject such cases without getting themselves admitted.

Brokers and similar intermediaries and merchants who are obstructing the tiller from enjoying the fruits of his harvest must be prohibited. Agency which have direct marketing channels to reach the consumers must be made to procure agricultural products and thus the cultivator is assured of a reasonable price for his products.

Now Railways, Post and Telegraphs, Water Supply, Electricity, etc. are handled by the government departments directly for facilitating the public with utility services. This sort of governmental management must be extended to all other similar purposes and this must be done on a permanent basis.

What has been done by the government in the matter of providing insurance coverage for government servants i. e. through the Post offices, must be extended to the members of the Public too. The business of insurance should be taken over by the government itself.

The standard of living of labourers and other members of the public must be enhanced. For that, reasonable income must be fixed for them by the government through legislative measures.

*Social*

Compulsory primary education for all the sections of the society must be enforced within a stipulated time.

Within a stipulated time limit all possible efforts must be taken to redeem the people from the evils of drink and proper legislation must be enacted for the same.

Untouchability, the practice of prejudicial treatment meted out to human beings on the basis of their high and low births and superstitious blind beliefs must be rooted out of this society.

*Political*

Government jobs must be distributed on the basis of communal representation among all the communities of this Presidency each according to its population and also as per political aspirations of the people.

The land revenue system must be so altered as to ensure equal burden of land tax to all the people and also to scarp the land tax itself wherever it is felt necessary. (This means that land tax for small land holdings should be lesser and for big land holdings should be graded higher and higher).

More powers and more facilities should be provided for Municipalities, District Boards and Co-operative institutions so

that they may be of much use to the welfare of the public. These bodies should be made to function under the direct supervision of government officers.

Since the modern government system has proved to be burden some every endeavour must be taken to organise an efficient administration incurring only limited expenditure. Also, the pay scales must be fixed taking into account the average life pattern of the Indian people and the economic position that prevails in India.

For implementing these schemes legislations must be brought forth wherever necessary. In addition to legislation it is also necessary to undertake propagation of these schemes so that members of the public understand them clearly.

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Sami Chidambaranar, *Thamizhar Thalaivar*, pp. 165—167.

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Sami Chidambaranar, *Thamizhar Thalaivar*, pp. 165—167.

# APPENDIX X

1வது வயது 1st Period

## மஹாசபை நோட்டீஸ்

## THE RATIONAL BOOKS PUBLISHING SOCIETY LIMITED

### பகுத்தறிவு நூற்பதிப்புக் கழகம் லிமிட்டெட்

தோழர் ................................................................................

.............................................................................. அவர்கட்கு.

தோழரே!

இதனடியிற்கண்ட விஷயங்களைத் தீர்மானிக்கும் பொருட்டு கழகத்தின் ரிஜிஸ்டரான ஆபீசில் 1934-ளூ மே·மீ 27-உ மாலை 4-மணிக்குக் கூடும் மகா சபைக்குத் தாங்கள் வரவேணுமாய்க் கேட்டுக் கொள்ளப்படுகிறது.

**விஷயம்**

1) 31-4-34உ முடிவாகிய முதலாவது வயதின பாலன்ஸ்ஷீட்டையும் நிறைவேற்றற் கழகத்தார் ரிப்போர்ட்டையும் வாசிக்கக் கேட்டு பாஸ் செய்தல்.

2) கழகத்தின் அடுத்த ஆண்டிற்கு வேண்டிய நிறைவேற்றற் கழக அங்கத்தினர்கள் தேர்ந்தெடுத்தல்.

3) கழக ரூல்ஸ் புஸ்தகத்தில் அவசியமான திருத்தங்கள் செய்தல்.

4) அடுத்த ஆண்டிற்கு வேண்டிய ஆடிட்டரை நியமித்துஷியாருக்கு பீஸ் தீர்மானித்தல்.

ஈரோடு, | A. Raghavan,

30—4—34. | காரியதரிசி

## THE RATIONAL BOOKS PUBLISHING SOCIETY LTD., ERODE

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31st MARCH 1934

| LIABILITIES | Amount Rs. A. P. | Total Rs. A. P. | ASSETS | Amount Rs. A. P. | Total Rs. A. P. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CAPITAL | | | Furniture (At cost) | | 29—0—0 |
| Authorised and issued capital : | | | Preliminary expenses | | 315—0—3 |
| 3000 shares of Rs. 10 each | | 30,000— 0—0 | Outstandings due to the Society considered good | | 60—7—4 |
| Subscribed capital : 539 shares of Rs. 10 each | | 5,390— 0—0 | Stock of books and paper on hand as certified by the Secretary (at cost) | | 754—5—8 |
| Paid up capital : | | | Cash and other balances : | | |
| 539 shares of Rs. 2—8—0 each | 1347—8—0 | | with Erode Urban Bank Ltd., on Current Account | 5— 4—10 | |
| ADD Calls paid in advance | 262—8--0 | 1,610— 0—0 | On hand with the Secretary | 40—12— 5 | 46—1—3 |
| | | | Profit and loss account : | | |
| Sundry Creditors | | 10—12—0 | Net loss per Profit and loss Account | | 415--13—6 |
| Total Rupees | | 1,620—12—0 | Total Rupees | | 1,620—12—0 |

We have examined the above Balance Sheet with the books and vouchers relating thereto, and have obtained all the information and explanations we have required. In our opinion, it is drawn up in conformity with the law and exhibits a true and correct view of the state of the Society's affairs as on 31st March 1934, according to the best of our information and the explanations given to us and as shown by the books of the Society.

ERODE,

Dated 22nd April, 1934.

N. C. RAJAGOPAL & Co.,
Government Diplomates in Accountancy,
Registered Accountants, Auditors.

## TRADING AND PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT FOR THE PERIOD FROM 13th DECEMBER 1932

### To 31st March 1934

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| To Books purchased, and cost of printing | 729—10—0 | By Sale of books | | 527—10— 4 |
| To Paper purchased | 593— 3—2 | By Closing Stock : | | |
| | | Books | 631—5—7 | |
| Total Rupees | 1,288—13—2 | Paper | 123—0—1 | 754— 5— 8 |
| | | By Balance being Gross Loss | | 6—13— 2 |
| | | Total Rupees | | 1,288—13— 2 |
| To Gross Loss as above | 6—13— 2 | | | |
| To Salary | 212— 8— 0 | | | |
| To Registration | 12— 4— 0 | By Sale of Rules Book | | 61— 0— 0 |
| To Travelling | 121—15— 4 | | | |
| To Stationery | 100— 1—11 | By Interest received from Urban Bank | | 1— 6— 5 |
| To Audit fee | 20— 0— 0 | | | |
| To General charges | 4— 9— 6 | By Balance being Net Loss carried to Balance sheet | | |
| Total Rupees | 478— 3—11 | Total Rupees | | 478— 3—11 |

EXAMINED AND FOUND CORRECT.

ERODE,

Dated 22nd April, 1934

N. C. Rajagopal & Co.,

Government Diplomates in Accountancy,
Registered Accountants, Auditors.

Secretary,

A. Raghavan

Directors,

V. Barthasarathi

S. Ramasamy Naicker

C. Natarajan

I hereby certify that this balance sheet was placed before the general meeting held on 15th June, 1934 and approved.

Secretary.

# The Self-Respect Movement Its Programme And Policy

*Mr. E.V. Ramaswami Naicker's Statement*

Mr. E. V. Ramaswami Naicker has issued the following statement:

I have observed that, for sometime past, a great deal of misunderstanding has been caused in the mind of the public about the aims and the objects of the Self-Respect Movement. This misunder standing is, in a large measure due to the misrepresentations and malicious propaganda on the part of the enemies of the Movement. It has, therefore, become necessary to give a re-statement of what the movement stands for, so that the public may not be labouring under any false ideas regarding the Movement.

Broadly stated, the Self-Respect Movement has, from its inception, aimed at ameliorating the conditions of the depressed and the oppressed communities of South India and to raise the status of our women. To realise the main object of the Movement, it has become necessary to work along political, economic and social lines. As one who is largely responsible for the inception of the movement, I propose to restate our aim in these three spheres.

*Political*

In the early years of the Movement, we attempted to eschew politics from the sphere of our activities. We soon realised that the activities of the Congress, under the Brahmin monopolists acting in the name of Congress, were insidiously directed against the main planks in our programme So far as South India is concerned, the Congress is an organisation controlled by the Brahmins. The Brahmins who found their pretensions to social superiority assailed by the Self-Respectors began to use the Congress organisations to attack our Movement. This made it necessary for us to take a more

direct part in the political activities of the province also. We soon realised that, for the social advancement of the vast masses, the power of the Congress which yielded the Brahmin monopoly should be destroyed.

With this end in view, we have given unqualified support to all those who work along constitutional lines, and we have not hesitated to support the Government wherever we were convinced that the Government was in the right. Our political programme, therefore, is the very negation of the Congress policy of Civil Disobedience and Non-Co-operation. In spite of this, it is an irony of fate that some associate our Movement with subversive activities against the established Government. I hope that this clear and unambiguous statement will once for all put a stop to the mischievous propaganda directed against us.

Apart from the need for fighting the activities of the Congress, we realised that we require the administrative and legislative co-operation of the Government in the practical realisation of our programme. In its political sphere, therefore, the Self-Respect Movement is a constitutional movement working in co-operation with the Government.

*Economic*

It is now generally recognised that the economic welfare of the masses is the primary concern of all civilised Governments. It is also now well recognised, even in the most conservative countries, that a more rational re-arrangement of the means of production and distribution should be brought about with a view to increasing the standard of life of the people and to effect a more equitable distribution of national wealth. The Self-Respect Movement has naturally fallen in line with these progressive conceptions.

But our Movement has never aimed, and will not aim at achieving the result by revolutionary or subversive methods. Far from bringing about any catastrophic disturbance, we aim at bringing about these reforms with the help and co-operation of the Government. The greater extension of the co-operative movement, labour legislation, national control of public utility concerns,

relief of rural indebtedness–these are some of the methods which we propose to adopt in the furtherance of our economic programme.

*Social*

We have realised, from the outset, that the political and economic backwardness of the masses is, in a large measure, the result of their social degradation and the fissiparous tendencies resulting from caste and religious differences. We have always main tained that the blind superstitions and the social evils which hold the masses in their grip have kept them in poverty and ignorance.

We have therefore aimed at routing out these evils. And, for that purpose, we expose the hollowness of those religious creeds which not merely tolerate but enforce such social inequalities. The caste system has been the greatest obstacle to all progress, political, economic and social and we therefore aim at eradicating the evils based on that system. In the furtherance of this object we never aim at inciting hatred between communities. Nor is it our intention to wound the susceptibilities of any individual or community.

To sum up, in its political activities, the Self-Respect Movement aims at checking the subversive activities of the Congress, and for this purpose, we not merely follow constitutional methods but whole-heartedly co-operate with the Government, whenever it is necessary. In its economic activities, the Movement aims at raising the standard of life of every citizen. In the social sphere, it aims at the abolition of caste system and the removal of all disabilities based on birth.

It is my personal conviction that our programme has a greater chance of realisation under the guidance of the British Government than under the aegis of the Congress Raj.

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*Justice*, 6 March, 1935.

# Self-Respect Movement And Politics

Mr. S. Ramanathan, General Secretary, The Self-Respect League's statement.

The affairs of the Self-Respect League have reached a stage at which some explanation is due by me to the public. The principles and programme of the League are embodied in the resolutions of the three Provincial Conferences we have had and there is no need for me to expetiate upon them now. But I desire to point out that the Self-Respect Movement is an attempt to rebuild the cultural life of the people of India. It is especially devoted to abolishing discriminations based on caste and religion. It is concerned with abolishing the superstitions of creed and breed. The Self-Respect Movement is essentially non-political and maintains absolute neutrality at election fights.

But the conduct of certain individuals connected with the Movement has been something of a puzzle. Mr. E. V. Ramaswami Naicker in particular, who is one of the Vice-Presidents of the League, has elected himself the High Priest of the Movement and has made political capital out of the enthusiam which the Movement has evoked among the masses. He has indulged in irresponsible declarations against all and sundry and has been rushing from one extreme to another, posing at one time as the champion revolutionary and at another as the ultra conservative. Since his return from Europe, two years ago, he has been uttering mouthfuls on the platform to excite the administration of the multitude, while, at the same time, he has been making abject attempts to hobnob with every person dressed with Governmental authority. The wonder of it all has been that there were persons at both ends who could not see through him but took him at his words. It is a sad reflection that the amount of notoriety that this Mr. Side-both-ways

has gained is a measure of the ignorance of the public, their short-sightedness and their lack of memory about the exploits of our political performers. In a signed editorial in the 'Kudi Arasu' of 31st March Mr. Ramasami Naicker claims that he has established relationships with some high placed Government officials and he has arrived some important agreements with them. In fact if Mr. Ramasami Naicker is to be believed a momentous conference was recently held within closed doors, between an august representative of His Majesty and the Supreme Leader of the Self-Respect Movement and far-reaching conclusions were arrived at regarding the political future of the country. I trust the public has learnt, by now to assess these fantastic claims at their proper worth. The fact of the matter is now clear beyond all shadow of doubt, Mr. Ramasami Naicker has for long played upon the emotions of the people and officials. He has excited the ignorant and over-awed the nervous. But he has over-reached his mark and has landed himself in batant contradictions. He has now admitted that he never meant what he said and that his admirers have exaggerated the significance of his words. Humiliated at being forced to eat his words, he is putting a brave face and is uttering invocations to the mysterious powers. It is the psychology of chagrin and thwarted ambition. Mr. Ramasami Naicker's game is up. He realises it and hence his desperate efforts to seek shelter within the folds of the Justice party.

The Justice party has been, for some time past, looking at Mr. Ramasami Naicker with wistful eyes unable to determine whether he would prove an asset in these days of depression or he would prove a burdensome liability better left alone. Some members of the party might not have forgotten the behaviour of Mr. Ramasami Naicker during the last general elections to the Provincial Councils when he allowed the Party organ, the Dravidan, entrusted to his care to be used by the opponents of the party, indeed, to fight the party itself. I desire to warn the Justice Party of the folly of renewing the alliance with Mr. Naicker in the hope of enlisting the support of the Self-Respect Movement. The Self-Respect Movement will not bend to the purposes of Mr. Naicker. It is concerned with far deeper problems than those which excite the electroates and hence can not be made to serve the interests of

political parties. The ranks of the Self-Respect Movement are open to persons who hold diverse political views, to Justicites as well as to Congressmen and to Socialists. It would be absurd to contend that all members of the Justice Party have outgrown their prejudices of caste and religion or that all congressmen are addicted to such prejudice.

There are many Congressmen, who go the whole hog with the Self-Respectors while there are not a few Justicities who are distinguished for their caste marks and their religious fanaticism. The Self-Respect Movement has introduced a new element of social service which cuts right across the border lines of existing political parties. Any attempt, therefore, to exploit the Self-Respect Movement for narrow, political purposes will redound to the discredit of those who make it.

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*Justice*, 11 April, 1935.

# Self-Respect League

*How to become a Member?*

1. If there is already a Branch at your village or town, please go there and ask the local secretary for the enrolment book. Put your signature to mark your acceptance of the objects of the League, pay the annual subscription of four annas and obtain the receipt which will entitle you to the membership. You will thereafter consider yourself a missionary for the cause of truth, reason and enlightenment and will dedicate your life for the eradication of ignorance, superstition and fanaticism of all kinds.

2. If there is no branch already functioning at your place, you are a pioneer and you should take steps to open the branch. Your duty is, therefore, either of the following :-

(a) If you are in any of the Tamil Districts, please write to the HEAD OFFICE OF THE LEAGUE, EAST MASI STREET, MADURA. offering your co-operation in starting the branch. The Head Office will then move in the matter.

b) If you are outside the Tamil speaking area, please write to the BRANCH OFFICE OF THE LEAGUE, 9, BROADWAY, MADRAS, giving full details about the prospects for opening a branch at your place. You will obtain the necessary help to proceed.

## OBJECTS

1) Diffusing useful knowledge by establishing libraries and reading rooms and organising lectures for the spread of knowledge and promoting cultural contacts between different nationalities.

2) Living in the light of reason and science and abolishing customs and practices based on mere faith.

3) Fighting the pernicious doctrine of Varnashrama which is based on the theory that gradations of merit and demerit are attached to birth and which is responsible for the institution of caste.

4) Fostering absolute equality of humans without differences based on colour, race or sex.

5) Striving to abolish organised religion which has engendered fanaticism, rivalry and hatred between communities and insisting upon the secularisation of the state, law, art, education and all public instructions.

6) Working for the abolition of religious ceremonials on occasions of marriage, death and other crises in the life of individuals.

The League will establish branches in different centres to do all that is necessary to achieve the above objects.

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

| | |
|---|---|
| President | W. P. A. Soundrapandian, Pattiveeranpatti, Madura District. |
| Vice-President | K. A. P. Viswanathan, Maniakara Street, Trichinopoly. |
| Secretary | S. Ramanathan, 9, Broadway, Madras. |
| Treasurer | V. V. Ramasami, Municipal Chairman, Virudhunagar. |
| Members | Sami Chidambaran, Munnetram Press, Kumbakonam, A. Ponnambalam, Poovalur, Trichy District. J. S. Kannappar, U.M.S. Ltd., Coimbatore. Vaisu Shanmugam, Banker, Kanadukathan. M.S. Sivasamy, 22, Vaithyar Street, Tuticorin. A. Venugopal, C.M.V. Press, Madura. V. S. S. Mani, Chithyankottai, Madura District. P. P. Ramaswamy, Udumalpet, Coimbatore District. |

A. P. R. Sundarapandiyan, Thirumangalam, Madura District. T. Avudayappan, Panagal Villa, Sholavandan, Madura District.

## RULES

(1) Any person who has attained the age of 18 and subscribes in writing to the objects of the League and remits in advance a subscription of four annas for every year computed from January to the Treasurer of the League, will be a member unless removed from the rolls in accordance with the provisions contained herein.

(2) A member may be removed from the rolls of membership by a resolution of the Conference on the recommendations of the Executive Committee. A member so removed will not be eligible for readmission for a period of five years since the date of such removal. No action shall be taken under this rule without the Executive committee giving the member concerned one month's notice of their intention to move the Conference to remove his name from the rolls.

(3) The management of the affairs of the League shall vest in the Executive Committee consisting of not less than eleven and not more than twenty one members including a president, a Vice-President, a secretary and a Treasurer.

(4) The Executive Committee shall be elected annually at the Conference and shall hold office until the holding of the next Conference. The election shall be by ballot or by show of hands.

(5) Interim vacancies in the Executive Committee shall be filled in by nominations by the Executive Committee.

(6) The Executive Committee shall have power to do everything necessary to carry on the objects of the League and in particular :

a) to purchase, sell and hold immovable and movable property on behalf of the League.

b) to publish journals and other literature, to organise meetings and to conduct propaganda.

c) to pass by-laws not inconsistent with these rules.

(7) The Secretary shall have power.

a) to take steps to carry out the resolutions of the Executive Committee.

b) to represent the League in all matters and to sue and be sued in courts of law and carry on correspondence on behalf of the League.

c) to employ persons and to remove them from the service of the League subject to the confirmation of the Executive Committee.

d) documents required to be executed by the League shall be signed by the Secretary and shall be sealed by the seal of the League after obtaining the permission of the Executive Committee. Documents in favour of the League shall be executed in favour of the Secretary for the time being.

(8) The Treasurer shall receive all moneys due to the League and maintain accounts of receipts and disbursements. He will operate Bank accounts on behalf of the League subject to the approval of the Executive Committee.

(9) The quorum for a meeting of the Executive Committee shall be one third of their total strength.

(10) The Conference of the League shall ordinarily be held once a year at a time and place to be decided by the Executive Committee. The Conference will consist of delegates elected by the branches at the rate of one per 100 or fraction of a 100 of the members belonging to each branch. Every delegate will have one vote at the Conference. The members of the Executive Committee will be ex-officio delegates.

(11) The President of the outgoing Executive Committee will occupy the chair at the opening of the Conference which will proceed to the following business:—

a) to consider the report of the Executive Committee regarding the progress of the achievement of the objects of the League in the previous year.

b) the passing of the audited accounts of the League for the previous year.

c) election of a new Executive Committee.

After the election, the new President will take the chair and the Conference will proceed to consider resolutions placed on the agenda by the Executive Committee and resolutions of which a week's notice shall have been given in writing by a delegate.

(12) Members of the League living in each village or group of villages and in each town or portion of a town will together constitute a local branch of the League. Each branch will elect from among its members a local committee whose constitution will be settled by the members. Each local committee will function towards the achievement of the objects of the League in the locality. Each branch will be free to collect donations from its members and others and will expend the same subject to the control of the League's Executive Committee.

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*Pamphlet issued by the Self-Respect League.*

## APPENDIX XIV

### திருச்சி ஜில்லா

# சுயமரியாதைச் சங்கம்

### திருச்சிராப்பள்ளி

### அங்கத்தினர் விண்ணப்பத்தாள்

தேதி....................

காரியதரிசிகளுக்கு,

அடியிற் கையொப்பமிட்டுள்ள நான் ஷை சங்க கொள்கை-களுக்கும், சட்டதிட்டங்களுக்கும் கட்டுப்பட்டு ஒரு அங்கத்தினராக சேர சம்மதிக்கிறேன்.

முதல் மாத ( ) சந்தாவாக ரூ.
இத்துடன் செலுத்தியிருக்கிறேன்.

அங்கீகரிக்கப்பட்டது.

காரியதரிசிகள். கையெழுத்து,

முகவரி

பெயர்.......................................

தொழில்....................................

இடம்.......................................

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(ii) Newspapers and Journals in Indian Languages.

IV INTERVIEWS

V BOOKS, PAMPHLETS, ARTICLES AND LETTERS IN ENGLISH

VI BOOKS, PAMPHLETS, ARTICLES AND LETTERS IN TAMIL

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Munnetram
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Nam Nadu
Navasakthi
Ooliyan
Pahuttarivu
Por Murasu
Por val
Prachanda Vikatan
Pratidinam
Puduvai Murasu
Pudu Valvu
Pudu Ulagam
Puratchi
Samadharmam
Samadarsini
Sandamarudham
Sailul Xslam
Senguntha Mitran
Senthamil Chelvi
Sivanesan
Sukothayam

Suyamariathai Thondan
Swadanthira Sangu
Swadesamitran
Tamilnadu
Tamizhan
Tamizhar Nesan
Thondan
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*WRAPPER : PANNAI PRINTERS MADURAI*